Toward an Integrative Conceptual Framework of Destinations

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Abstract
Destinations are a fundamental focus of much tourism research. How we conceptualize and frame destinations is critical not only for the research that we do but also for practical matters such as destination management and marketing. To date, however, work on the conceptual and theoretical foundations of destinations has been fragmented, incomplete, and without much general sense of direction. Through a wide-ranging review, this paper seeks to develop an integrative conceptual framework of destinations by systematically identifying and then synthesizing the key elements of five major sets of concepts used to depict and analyze destinations: industrial districts, clusters, networks, systems, and social constructs. A set of recurring elements is identified, grouped under three major dimensions—geographic, mode of production, and dynamic—and presented in an initial integrative framework. Issues of extending and operationalizing the framework are outlined and the implications for destination management discussed.

Keywords
destinations, industrial districts, clusters, networks, systems, social constructs

Introduction
Destinations are a fundamental feature of tourism research. Indeed, “destination” is such a commonly used term that it is often taken for granted and not even defined.

Attempts to develop a widely accepted definition have proved elusive. Work on the conceptual and theoretical foundations of destinations has been fragmented, incomplete, and without much general sense of direction (Framke 2002; Saraniemi and Kylänen 2011). Although the focus of a growing number of studies, this more conceptual approach has largely been confined to researchers in Europe; Anglo-American researchers have been much less active in this domain. More work is long overdue because how we conceptualize and frame destinations is critical not only for the research that we do but also for practical matters such as destination management and marketing. Our conceptualization of destinations will influence the problems we address, shape our research design and methodology, and influence the interpretation of our findings. The nature and scope of the concepts used may determine the focus of management, who or what is managed, where management priorities lie, and where solutions might be found.

Researchers endeavoring to provide a stronger conceptual underpinning to their work have usually done so by reference to a broader, more theoretically based concept from outside the domain of tourism, such as clusters and industrial districts. Some may combine or draw on more than a single concept (Capone 2006; Jackson and Murphy 2002) but often it is the shortcomings of other concepts rather than any common features that are emphasized when researchers opt to frame their work in terms of a specific conceptualization (Prats, Guia, and Molina 2008; Merinero Rodríguez and Pulido Fernández 2009; Saraniemi and Kylänen 2011). In their attempt to problematize destinations, for example, Saraniemi and Kylänen (2011) review three “conventional” approaches to researching destinations—economic geography–oriented, marketing management–oriented and customer-oriented—before advocating an “alternative” social constructionist perspective. In other cases, competing concepts might be ignored altogether. However, as research on other aspects of tourism has shown, there is much to be gained by being less dismissive and by taking a more integrative approach that identifies and synthesizes common or complementary elements to develop a more comprehensive picture and understanding of the phenomenon in question (Pearce 2012).

It is in this context that this paper seeks through a wide-ranging review to develop an integrative conceptual...
framework of destinations by systematically identifying and then synthesizing the key elements of five major sets of concepts used to depict and analyze destinations: industrial districts, clusters, networks, systems, and social constructs. The results of this analysis are presented in the following sections where the essence of each concept is outlined, the destination applications are summarized, and the key elements are discussed before an integrative framework is presented. The implications of the selection of a particular concept for destination management and the value of the initial framework are then discussed.

Approach

The five sets of concepts reviewed are not specific to tourism but have been drawn upon or adapted from those originally developed in other fields. The boundaries between them are not always clear cut and rigid; in some cases the terms are used loosely and even interchangeably, in others, a more rigorous terminology is adopted. Usage may vary from one part of the world to another and also depend on language, the background of the researcher, and the nature of the problem under consideration. Moreover, subtypes may occur within categories. To avoid getting bogged down in semantics, we acknowledge this variation in terminology, recognize that some overlap may occur between categories, and concentrate on the key features of each concept.

Tourism researchers may make explicit or indirect reference to the origins of the concepts in applying them to destinations. A review of the tourism papers suggests they offer their own interpretation of each concept and do not consistently identify and apply the same elements or explore the same relationships. Where differences occur, it is often because specific attributes or relationships are emphasized rather than because they conflict. As a result, aspects of different concepts are often complementary and a deeper understanding of destinations can be obtained by bringing these together. Where alternative interpretations arise or different explanations are offered, this may provide a more comprehensive understanding or highlight particular areas for further consideration, whether theoretical or practical.

Because of the variable coverage, it is necessary to begin the review by going back to the foundation concepts rather than just focusing on the tourism applications. In terms of industrial districts, the reference paper is that by Becattini (1990); for clusters, it is Porter (1998). With the other concepts, there is less consistent reference to a specific author or paper. In these cases, the general characteristics of each concept are summarized from a range of papers before their tourism applications are considered.

A large concept/elements matrix was used to analyze in turn the foundation concepts and associated destination applications so as to identify the key elements of each and the relationships between them. The challenge here was to achieve a balance between the detail of specific studies and the fundamental elements and relationships of each concept. Particular elements were then grouped under three major dimensions—geographic, dynamic, and mode of production—which allowed an initial integrative conceptual framework showing the relationships between them to be developed.

Conceptualizations of Destinations

Industrial Districts

The comparison of tourism destinations to industrial districts is most evident among studies by European researchers (Aurioles, Fernández and Manzanera 2008; Capone 2006; Gaido 2002; Hjalager 2000; Maulet 2006; Petrić and Mrnjavac 2003; Sainaghi 2006). The underlying ideas about industrial districts derive from the work of the 19th-century British economist Alfred Marshall who identified the external economies of concentrations of particular industries in particular localities in terms of the availability of skilled labor, the growth of supporting trades, and linkages between specialized enterprises. The modern conceptualization of the industrial district grew out of research by Becattini (1990) and others examining the success of industrial areas in Italy (Markusen 1996). Markusen offered a fourfold typology of industrial districts in which the Italianate Marshallian form illustrated by Becattini is complemented by three others: the hub-and-spoke district, the satellite industrial platform, and the state-centered district. Tourism researchers have drawn essentially on the Italianate model.

Becattini (1990, p. 38) defined an industrial district as “a socio-territorial entity which is characterized by the active presence of both a community of people and a population of firms in one naturally and historically bounded area. In the district, unlike in other environments . . . community and firms tend to merge.” He argues (p. 37) that “any phenomenon which exists through time is assumed to possess some internal logic” and devotes his paper to explaining that logic. In doing so, he places particular emphasis on the way in which a specialized activity composed mainly of small firms is embedded in the community and their behavior is governed by local values and rules that depend on trust and personal relationships. Interdependence is a key feature: the firm is seen both as an entity in its own right and as “a specific cog in a specific district.” Districts are said to be self-organizing. Becattini also outlines the dynamic nature of industrial districts, portraying them as “adaptive systems” that evolve in response to market needs and changing conditions. Values are transmitted from one generation to another, human resources are constantly reallocated, and technological advances are readily accommodated as a gradual social process. In addition, Becattini underlines the importance of external connections; the surplus of production cannot be sold within the district and requires (p. 38) “the development of a permanent network of links between the district and it suppliers and clients” (p. 44) and the need for “an ‘image’ of
the district which is separated both from the single firms in it and from that of other districts.” The entrepreneur’s “special function lies in translating all the capabilities which are latent in the historical heritage of the district into products that can be sold in [the world market]” (p. 43).

Tourism researchers suggest similarities between industrial districts and tourism are readily identifiable in the emphasis on the interdependence of generally small and medium-sized firms concentrated in a particular location serving a particular sector and the external economies that this may bring. However, each one elaborates on particular elements and expresses them in different ways. Gaido (2002, p. 112) asserts a district “is ‘situated’ and therefore able to be read” in terms of its geographic, social, and cultural features. In economic terms, it is also a “mode of organization” involving the “supple specialization” of SMEs. Hjalager (2000) characterizes industrial districts in terms of the interdependence of firms, flexible firm boundaries, cooperative competition, trust in sustained collaboration, and a “community culture” with supportive public policies. She notes that many of these features may be shared by tourism destinations but that destinations often have nonsupportive governance structures, free-riding firms, and a dependency on multinationals. Maulet (2006) focuses on structural issues, namely the degree of systemic consciousness among firms, strategic means display, degree of cumulative advantage, and degree of spatial concentration. Petrić and Mrnjavac (2003) compare tourist destinations with industrial districts and sustainable development models using the following attributes: spatial/functional organization, product/production, enterprises, competition, social-cultural embeddedness, and stakeholders’ engagement.

Clusters

A second territorial-based industrial organization model widely applied to destinations is the cluster, a concept popularized by Porter (1998) who sought to explain the changed role of location and show how companies today continually create competitive advantage in a global economy through the benefits that proximity to interconnected firms brings. According to Porter (1998, p. 78), clusters are “geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field. Clusters encompass an array of linked industries and other entities important to competition. . . . Clusters also extend downstream to channels and customers and laterally to manufacturers of complementary products.” The role of location is no longer the traditional one of giving places a comparative advantage; rather, it is the benefits of colocation that makes them competitive. Clusters, Porter (p. 79) argues, represent “a kind of new spatial organizational form in between arm’s length markets on the one hand and hierarchies, or vertical integration, on the other.” Such a form, he continues, is critical to improving competition and increasing productivity. “A cluster allows each member to benefit as if it had greater scale or as if it had joined with others formally—without requiring it to sacrifice its flexibility.” Productivity is said to increase as clusters enable better access to employers and suppliers, to specialized information, and to institutions and public goods; they provide better motivation and make measurement easier; and offer the benefits of complementarity, that is, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Porter uses tourism to illustrate this last aspect. Clusters are also said to drive the direction and pace of innovation by making opportunities more visible, by lowering the costs to experiment, and by sheer competitive pressure. Similar factors also foster new business formation. Once formed, increased competition, better productivity, more innovation, and the formation of new businesses lead clusters to grow in a “self-reinforcing cycle.”

The merits of clusters and clustering advanced by Porter have no doubt contributed to the widespread adoption of the concept by researchers and policy makers, including an increasing application to destinations. Martin and Sunley (2003), however, urge a more cautious approach, arguing the cluster is a somewhat chaotic concept that lacks clear boundaries, both geographic and industrial; that there are theoretical weaknesses relating to competitiveness; that difficulties arise with mapping and measuring clusters; and that the “evidence of a positive association between clustering and innovation is not consistent” (p. 22).

Jackson and Murphy (2002, p. 38) nevertheless contend that “the cluster concept’s application to tourism destinations would appear to be particularly germane. Not only is tourism within a destination a conglomeration of activities and facilities creating a ‘destination product’ in Smith’s words (1994) but increasingly these different components are brought together in destination associations and partnership marketing (Pearce 1992).” Fabry (2009), however, notes that tourism clusters differ from industrial ones by being areas where tourism production and consumption occur simultaneously. Canina, Enz, and Harrison (2005) suggest the production-based benefits of clusters (e.g., access to suppliers) are more applicable to manufacturing, whereas demand-based ones (e.g., reduced cost search for customers and closer monitoring of competitors for firms) are more relevant to services, including the lodging industry.

Following Porter, tourism researchers often emphasize the general benefits of clusters, particularly for innovation (Dragusin, Constantin, and Petrescu 2010; Hawkins 2004; Iordache, Ciochină, and Asandei 2010; Ivaniiș 2011; Michael 2003; Thomazi, 2006), and consider them as a means of promoting endogenous development (Varisco 2004) and stimulating competitiveness (Fabry 2009). Tourism researchers may also use a set of cluster attributes to diagnose the state of particular destinations and make policy recommendations (Cunha Barbosa and Aricò Zamboni 2001; Jackson and Murphy 2002, 2006; Lazzaretta 2003; Montero and Para 2001; Silvan Lira 2002; Thomazi 2006; Varisco 2004).
Commonly recurring attributes include geographic concentration, interdependence, and complementarity. There is also discussion of the evolution of clusters (Bernini 2009; Jackson and Murphy 2002; Thomazi 2006) and recognition that different types may exist (Dragusin, Constantin, and Petrescu 2010; Ivaniš 2011; Thomazi 2006; Varisco 2004). Fabry (2009) underlines the role of clusters in strengthening external visibility as well as facilitating internal coherence. She also emphasizes the need for external linkages through value chains.

**Networks**

Network analysis is widely used today in such fields as mathematics, social network analysis, policy network analysis, and management and is increasingly being applied in tourism (Scott, Cooper, and Baggio 2008a; Pearce 2012). Usage and definitions of the term network vary from a loose reference to social connections to a more precise mathematical meaning (Scott, Cooper, and Baggio 2008a). According to Rocks, Gilmore, and Gibson (2005, p. 82), “The basic components of a network are nodes and connections.” In a social science context, nodes are replaced with actors and connections with social ties and bonds (Davern 1997). Three fundamental types of network are commonly recognized: exchange, communication, and social (Szarka 1990). The concern of network theory is with the collective, rather than the individualistic or dyadic nature of organizational action, behavior, and constraints (Pavlovich 2003). Network characteristics commonly analyzed include density, centrality, cohesiveness, size, prominence, level of formality, level of stability and level of flexibility (Rocks, Gilmore, and Gibson 2005; Scott, Cooper, and Baggio 2008a).

In adopting a network perspective tourism, researchers explicitly recognize the multiple stakeholders involved in destinations and the importance of understanding the relationships among them, especially in terms of delivering the tourist experience (Camprubi, Guia, and Comas 2008; Denicolai, Cioccarelli, and Zucchella 2010; Pavlovich 2003; Scott, Cooper, and Baggio 2008b). Denicolai, Cioccarelli, and Zucchella (2010, p. 261), for example, write of “the tourist destination as a local network that creates value ‘with and for’ the tourist.” Others consider a network perspective particularly relevant for examining issues of governance and management (Bodega, Cioccarelli, and Denicolai 2004; Franch, Martini and Buffa 2010; Meriliäinen and Lemmetyinen 2011; Merinero Rodríguez 2008; Merinero Rodríguez and Pulido Fernández 2009; Timur and Getz 2008). The collective nature of the destination network management is emphasized by Meriliäinen and Lemmetyinen (2011, p. 28), who argue that “the coordination of cooperation seems to focus on the actor whereas strategic management approaches the action from the perspective of the whole network.”

Studies that conceptualize destinations as networks tend to focus on their structural characteristics, particularly those relating to density, centralization, and tie strength (Bodega, Cioccarelli, and Denicolai 2004; Merinero Rodríguez 2008; Merinero Rodríguez and Pulido Fernández 2009; Pavlovich 2003; Scott, Cooper, and Baggio 2008b; Timur and Getz 2008). In their comparative analysis of three cities in Andalucia, Merinero Rodríguez and Pulido Fernández (2009) complemented network analysis with an examination of other destination characteristics to reveal a positive relationship between the structure of the network and levels of tourism development. In an earlier study, Merinero Rodríguez (2008) elaborated on the connection between the density of the relationships in these cities and the types of collaborative activities undertaken: product development, management, promotion, and commercialization. He concluded that tourism development in the cases studied did not depend on locational advantages or the richness of their cultural heritage but was more a function of the strategies followed. In general, however, the resource base of destinations is not included in network analysis.

Neither is much attention usually given to contextual factors and the local community (Franch, Martini and Buffa 2010; Gibson, Lynch, and Morrison 2005; Merinero Rodríguez 2008; Ren 2010). The issue of the geographic limits of destination networks is also often not addressed explicitly. Scott, Cooper, and Baggio (2008b, p. 171) assert that “network analysis provides an alternative view to that of the ‘bounded’ destination, as the degree of the links defines its spatial extent.” Some writers differentiate between internal and external links but networks that extend through to the market can scarcely be said to be just destinations. Most network studies depict relations within a destination at a particular point in time but a few acknowledge their dynamic nature and outline how destinations may evolve (Gibson, Lynch, and Morrison 2005; Merinero Rodríguez and Pulido Fernández 2009; Pavlovich 2003; Ren 2010). Ren (2010, p. 293) takes a broader Actor Network Theory (ANT) approach whereby “the destination is to be understood as a heterogeneous network or tourismscape (van der Duim 2006) in which various human and non-human actors are ordered, associated and accorded agency.”

**Systems**

The term system is used with varying degrees of rigor but might be thought of as “a group of inter-related, interdependent and interacting elements that together form a single functional structure” (Weaver and Oppermann 2000, p. 23). The basic concept derives from von Bertalanffy’s general systems theory. As Leiper (2000, p. 570) notes: “The distinctive purpose of general systems theory is to deal with anything or any idea that seems complex. The aim is to reduce complexity. . . . The strategy for achieving this is, broadly
speaking, breaking a whole (thing or idea) into its elements, and then identifying the crucial elements to see how they are connected.” Systems may be hierarchical in nature, being composed of a set of ordered subsystems. They may also be open or closed depending on whether account is taken of the environments within which the system is embedded. Following Cilliers (1998), Baggio (2008, p. 5) lists the characteristic properties of complex systems as “a large number of elements form the system; interactions among the elements are nonlinear and usually have a somewhat short range; there are loops in the interactions; complex systems have a history, the ‘future’ behavior depends on the past one; each element is unaware of the behavior of the system as a whole; it reacts only to information that is available to it locally.” Baggio suggests that, by their nature, tourism destinations can be seen as complex adaptive systems.

More commonly, destinations are portrayed as some form of tourism system without reference back to a particular systems model or set of system characteristics. The use of systems allows for a more comprehensive conceptualization of destinations and a more explicit depiction of a wider range of factors and the relationships between them. The lack of reference to a specific systems model means different elements and types of relationships are emphasized and may be expressed more directly in tourism terms. As a result, destination systems are less uniform and more varied than the other concepts discussed above but might be categorized into two broad types: supply–demand systems and spatial systems.

**Supply–demand systems.** Studies portraying destinations as supply–demand systems focus on the relationships among the providers of goods and services in a particular location, the consumers of these (the visitors), and the mechanisms by which the goods and services are promoted and delivered (Machiavelli 2001; Manente and Cerato 2000a). Particular emphasis is given to the need to deliver an integrated set of goods and services. Machiavelli (2001, p. 8), for example, asserts: “Tourists perceive their destinations as an integrated supply system, a ‘unicum’ with which they relate and of which they evaluate the ability of providing satisfaction if all the main components find expression in a coordinated and synergetic approach.” This leads her to discuss the ways such an approach might be achieved; she outlines the benefits and also the challenges of developing cooperation among suppliers and concludes (p. 11) that success will depend on resorts “presenting themselves as an integrated offer system.”

In a similar vein, Bonetti, Petrillo, and Simoni (2006, p. 112) write: “assuming the territorial area as a starting unit of analysis, we can state that a tourism system does exist when all resources involved in the tourism activities are mutually linked by stronger relationships, compared to other territorial resources with different economic purposes.” They then focus on the relationships by which the tourism activities are linked in terms of two variables:

- the degree of interdependence among the system’s stakeholders as determined by the density of relationships, the degree of willingness and the degree of mutual trust;
- the degree of centralization of the system governance functions, which is affected by recognition of the governance body, the degree of strategy formalization, and the degree of centrality of the organizations.

Bonetti, Petrillo, and Simoni cross these two variables in a quadrant matrix to produce a typology of “four ideal types of tourism systems,” namely:

- market cluster (low interdependency/low centralization);
- district (high interdependency/low centralization);
- constellation (low interdependency/high centralization);
- tourism local system (high interdependency/high centralization).

Other researchers go beyond supplier relationships in developing their destination systems. Prats, Guia, and Molina (2008, p. 182) “understand territory as a collective construction, rather than simply as geographical proximity” and offer a systems model composed of four interconnecting blocks or major components: tourism agents, relational elements, the macro-environment and outcomes. In this way, they bring out not only the interaction among the agents but also the impact of macro-environmental factors and the way in which the components influence the capacity for innovation. Manente and Cerato (2000a) present a detailed destination system in which products are matched to visitor segments by the strategies and policies of local (including community) and nonlocal (e.g., tour operators) actors, and the behavior of the visitors. Supply and demand are also shown to be linked by the destination’s image and the consumers’ perception of the destination. Like Prats, Guia, and Molina (2008), Manente and Cerato (2000a) portray their destination system as an open one in which destination actors need to take account of their competitive environment. In his review, Capone (2006) outlines the characteristics of the SLOT (Tourism Local System) model popular in Italy in terms of the system (“the integrated activities rooted in the territory and requiring coordination and involvement of all stakeholders”), local characteristics, the range of tourism products, and a local system open to relations with the external world.

**Spatial systems.** Rather than emphasizing relationships between actors within a destination, tourism spatial systems focus on linkages between places. Many spatial systems adopt an origin–linkage–destination structure whereby destinations are presented as a counterpoint to origins or markets.
(Pearce 1995, 2012). The emphasis here is on destinations forming part of larger systems and on the way in which they are linked to origins by routes, transport services, distribution channels, and the flows of information and tourists. Leiper’s (1979) model is one of the more widely known. He takes a whole systems approach and shows destination regions linked to generating regions by flows of departing and returning tourists. Overlaid on this is the tourist industry, depicted graphically in very general terms in the model but elaborated on in the accompanying text as comprising six sectors: marketing, carriers, accommodation, attractions, miscellaneous services, and regulation. Leiper’s model also shows the tourism system operating within a broader set of environments.

Again, different researchers emphasize particular elements and relationships in their systems (Pearce 1995, 2012). Some stress the structural mechanisms that influence the flows between origins and destinations and the form development takes in the latter. Others highlight the fact that many places are origins as well as destinations, with reciprocal flows occurring between them. Tourism systems may also incorporate a hierarchical dimension whereby various levels of destinations and the relationships between these are recognized.

Barrado Timón (2004) takes a different geographical perspective and emphasizes the way in which tourism is inserted into or developed within a certain region or territory. Here a destination is portrayed as a subsystem that constitutes the area of overlap between two larger systems, one sectoral (tourism) and one territorial. Parts of the tourism sector (e.g., most of the marketing and distribution) occur in the market. Likewise, not all of the territory in which a destination develops is taken up by tourism; space is also occupied in varying degrees by other functions and activities (e.g., general infrastructure, residential and industrial areas). The destination is that subsystem where elements of both systems coincide, that is, that part of a territory given over to the accommodation, infrastructure, facilities, and resources used by tourists. Not only is it necessary to take account of the diverse relationships between these elements within the destination but also the relationships with the larger territory and the rest of the sector. While acknowledging the external links, Barrado Timón places particular emphasis on the spatial structure of destinations and the regions within which they develop, factors essentially neglected in the other concepts discussed. Variations in the nature, morphology, and organization of destinations are explained by such factors as the perception of visitors, and the scale and density of development.

Social Constructs

Drawing on the social constructionist approach, researchers have also portrayed destinations as social constructs. Iwashita (2003, p. 331) summarizes social constructionism as “the principle that social and cultural phenomena and individuals are social constructions produced and reproduced through historically and culturally situated interactions of people and human activities in society. Objects are not given in the world but constructed, negotiated, formed and fashioned by human beings through their social interaction and practices.” Social constructionism emphasizes transformation, involvement, and the multiple meanings people give to their lives and the places they inhabit.

Ringer (1998, p. 2) and contributors to his volume Destinations: Cultural Landscapes of Tourism (see especially the chapters by Saarinen and by Squire) conceptualize destinations, or more specifically destination communities, as social constructs, as “groups of people and their places of lived experiences whose cultural landscapes and local economies increasingly exhibit the influx of new ideas and changing patterns of social interpretation and communication associated with tourism’s progress.” This stance reflects the view (p. 1) that “tourism is a cultural process as much as it is a form of economic development” and stresses the multiple forces and factors that continually transform the sociospatial contexts that constitute destinations. Saarinen (2004, 169) argues: “As a social construct, the identity of a destination is a constantly changing ‘outcome’ of the process of transformation and the discourses constructing it, identifying the destination as a tourist space with both similar and distinctive elements relative to other tourist destinations.” Moreover, “a destination as a social construction can be perceived and interpreted differently by different groups and individuals because social and cultural meanings are subjective and differ between individuals” (Iwashita 2003, p. 336). One consequence of these multiple interpretations is that the boundaries of the destination are hard to define: “The destination many expand or shrink and it may receive deeper or superficial meanings” (Saraniemi and Kylänen 2011, p. 139).

Similar ideas are expressed in a recent volume of franco- phone studies whose title Destinations et territoires: co-présence à l’oeuvre (Lemasson and Violier 2009) captures the essence of the various contributions set mainly in France and Canada. According to Violier (2009, p. 1), destination is a term that has been mainly used in marketing to refer to the places to which tourists go while geographers have taken a more territorially based perspective using concepts such as espace touristique or lieu touristique to refer to “spatial objects transformed by tourism.” The notion of co-presence recognizes that these are spaces shared, and changed, by tourists and residents.

In reviewing destinations as social constructs from a marketing perspective, Saraniemi and Kylänen (2011) give particular weight to the role of tourists as producers, as cocreators of their own experiences. They contend (p. 139) that “the success of destinations no longer lies in the bundle of products offered by different service providers to customers but in the competitive processes that enable consumers to immerse themselves into and find the elements that they seek in (re)presenting and (re)producing their fragmented identities.”
Table 1. Dimensions and Elements of Destinations.

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Toward an Integrative Framework

Development of an integrative framework requires the key factors to be identified and the relationships between them to be established (Pearce 2012). In this systematic review of the key features of each of the five concepts—in their original articulation and in their application to destinations—a set of recurring elements or attributes were identified that might be grouped under three major dimensions: geographic, mode of production, and dynamic (Table 1).

Geographic Dimension

The geographic dimension of destinations is expressed in terms of a range of factors accorded differing levels of significance by different concepts. A first concern is with the spatial characteristics of destinations. The most common is the spatial concentration and colocation of specialized tourism firms and activities. The benefits of proximity are used to explain the functioning of clusters (Canina, Enz, and Harrison 2005; Fabry 2009; Ivaniš 2011; Varisco 2004), but there has been little attempt to map the actual spatial relationships of firms or activities. Differences occur with respect to the spatial extent of such concentrations, that is, whether they are “bounded” in particular locations as portrayed in the conceptualizations of industrial districts (Becattini 1990; Gaido 2002), defined in cluster and network analysis (Porter 1998; Scott, Cooper, and Baggio 2008b) by a set of linkages (whose selection is not always very explicit), correspond to a production–consumption unit (Barrado Timón 2004), or are seen to be inherently variable because of the multiple interpretations of places emphasized by the social constructionists (Saraniemi and Kylänen 2011). The hierarchical nature of many spatial subsystems also draws attention to the destinations being conceptualized at different spatial scales (Pearce 1995, 2012).

Such characteristics are internal to the destination. System conceptualizations, especially spatial systems, tend to adopt a broader perspective in which external linkages are also a vital feature and destinations are depicted as subsystems and need to be understood as counterparts to origins or markets (Leiper 1979; Manente and Cerato 2000a; Pearce 1995, 2012). This is a crucial element—stays away from one’s normal place of residence being a defining characteristic of tourism—but one that often appears to be assumed or overlooked in many conceptualizations of destinations and one that generally needs to be made more explicit. For tourism, it is not so much a question that the surplus of production cannot be sold locally (Becattini 1990) but rather, as Fabry (2009) reminds us, production and consumption incurs in situ at destinations and external linkages by way of image creation, distribution channels, and transport connections are essential to generate demand and encourage flows of tourists to the destination (Manente and Cerato 2000a). Destination researchers drawing on the industrial district concept (and others) might do well to revisit Becattini’s (1990) work in this regard. Moreover, as some of the network studies indicate, external network ties are also important for accessing information and as a source of innovation (Camprubi, Guia, and Comas 2008; Pavlovich 2003; Sundbo, Orfila-Sintes, and Sørensen 2007). Reciprocal flows are a feature of several spatial subsystems, with the result that most places are origins as well as destinations. However, there has been little explicit conceptualization of this dual identity (Pearce 1981) nor much attempt to go beyond an origin–destination dichotomy to differentiate tourism nodes in a spatial system in terms of the multiple functions performed and to conceptualize places as gateways, hubs, and stopovers or some combination of these (Lew and McKercher 2002; Lohmann and Pearce 2010).

Place rather than space attributes are emphasized in other concepts. Cultural characteristics and the degree of social embeddedness are stressed by social constructionists and those adopting an industrial districts approach (Gaido 2002; Lemasson and Violier 2009; Ringer 1998; Saraniemi and Kylänen 2011). Such attributes might also be acknowledged occasionally in some network studies but generally are not (Bodega, Cioccarelli, and Denicolai 2004; Gibson, Lynch, and Morrison 2005; Merinero Rodriguez 2008; Ren 2010). Local and broader contextual factors are incorporated in some of the destination systems (Leiper 1979; Manente and
Cerato 2000a; Prats, Guia, and Molina 2008). It is Barrado Timón (2004) who gives most explicit attention to place attributes and the geographical embeddedness of destinations by highlighting the importance of considering the manner in which tourism is inserted into a given territory. Barrado Timón also notes that tourism resources, as a rule, cannot be relocated but despite this the majority of the studies cited are silent on this geographic attribute. This silence may be largely due to the proposition advanced by Porter (1998) and other cluster and network proponents (Merinero Rodríguez 2008) that success is no longer based essentially on resources and other comparative advantages but on the way in which these are exploited in a competitive manner. Several South Americans, however, locate resources at the core of their graphic depictions of clusters (Cunha Barbosa and Aricó Zamboni 2001; Silvan Lira 2002; Varisco 2004); Dragusin, Constantin, and Petrescu (2010, p. 291) contend that local initiatives are “strongly correlated with the existing natural resources’ potential,” while for Lazzaretti (2003) a set of artistic, natural, and cultural resources together with a network of actors are the foundation for a High Cultural Cluster of a city.

**Mode of Production**

The use of models of industrial organization has resulted in destinations being portrayed much more explicitly as modes of production and drawn attention in differing degrees to the various interrelated elements of production. The emphasis here is on how destinations function, rather than on how they develop, the more traditional focus of much destination research (Pearce 2012).

A first concern has been with characterizing and analyzing the structural elements of production. Researchers conceptualizing destinations in terms of clusters and industrial districts stress colocation and the proximity of tourism firms and related institutions (Hjalager 2000; Canina, Enz, and Harrison 2005). They may present generalized models of tourism clusters (Cunha Barbosa and Aricó Zamboni 2001; Silvan Lira 2002; Hawkins 2004; Varisco 2004) but do not, with a few exceptions (Bernini 2009), offer the detailed empirical structural analysis that is the hallmark of those who see destinations as networks (Scott, Cooper, and Baggio 2008b; Timur and Getz 2008; Merinero Rodriguez and Pulido Fernández 2009).

Structural relationships are explained in terms of the interdependence of tourism firms offering complementary products and services within the destination so as to provide tourists with everything needed for their visit (Camprubi, Guia, and Comas 2008; Denicolai, Cioccarelli, and Zucchella 2010; Iviuš 2011; Machiavelli 2001; Petrič and Mrnjavac 2003). This is essentially to take the view of a destination as the product. Some researchers describe the production structure of destinations as horizontal (Machiavelli 2001; Sainaghi 2006) but Michael (2003) portrays it as diagonal because the firms whose products are interdependent are from different subsectors (accommodation, attractions, restaurants, etc.) not just colocated like enterprises. While there are benefits to the colocation or agglomeration of similar firms (Canina, Enz, and Harrison 2005), the notion of complementarity is perhaps expressed better as diagonal production.

The way in which the products of these firms are brought together varies (Machiavelli 2001; Sainaghi 2006). It may involve packaging by an intermediary and distribution via an external value chain for sale in the market or en route to the destination (Manente and Cerato 2000a; Fabry 2009). It may also occur by various forms of “at destination” distribution, for example, through multiple direct purchases by independent tourists at the destination or indirectly by referral between local suppliers or reservations and purchases made at a local visitor information centre (Pearce and Tan 2004). Social constructionists such as Saraniemi and Kylänen (2011) emphasize the tourists’ role as co-creator of their own destination experiences.

A second major concern is with the behavior of firms within the destination. Such behavior is generally portrayed as cooperative but competitive. According to the concepts applied, cooperation is a function of complementarity, trust, and economies of scale. The complementary nature of products encourages firms to cooperate as they recognize the benefits of working together to deliver a complete and satisfying experience to the visitor (Hjalager 2000; Gaido 2002). In this context, Maulet (2006) refers to the degree of systemic consciousness among firms while Bodega, Cioccarelli, and Denicolai (2004) emphasize the need for systemic rather than just individual success. Trust results from a shared culture and sense of belonging to a district (Hjalager 2000; Jackson and Murphy 2002, 2006; Petrič and Mrnjavac 2003; Bonetti, Petrillo, and Simoni 2006; Sainaghi 2006; Prats, Guia, and Molina 2008; Denicolai, Cioccarelli, and Zucchella 2010). Economies of scale have not received as much attention. This is somewhat surprising since they are a fundamental feature of the Marshallian industrial district and Porter’s (1998) clusters and many tourism firms are SMEs. Economies of scale do play a significant role in fostering cooperative behavior (Pearce 1992; Capone 2006; Iviuš 2011). The pooling of resources and collaborative marketing efforts, for instance, enables small and medium-sized businesses to create and implement a destination marketing strategy and build a stronger destination image that will have greater impact and achieve better results than a whole series of uncoordinated individual activities that will have difficulty penetrating distant and competitive markets. Infrastructural developments are also commonly a question of scale (Brown and Geddes 2007).

At the same time, following Porter’s (1998) cluster arguments, the behavior of firms remains competitive as each strives to attract its share of the destination’s market (Fabry 2009). Canina, Enz, and Harrison (2005, p. 567) observe: “from the firm perspective, co-location allows closer monitoring of
competitors and the ability to respond to specific competitor moves.” Moreover, the cumulative effect of the competitive but cooperative behavior of the individual firms is said to render the destination itself more competitive through the projection of a stronger destination image, more effective external linkages, more innovative firm behavior, and the ability to adapt to changing market conditions (Becattini 1990; Fabry 2009; Manente and Cerato 2009a; Petrić and Mrnjavac 2003; Porter 1998). Becattini’s observations on the way in which industrial districts behave in this regard have largely been neglected by tourism researchers and warrant closer attention.

Consideration of the actors involved in these modes of production is often less explicit and less frequent than issues of structure and behavior. Most of the analysis and discussion of destinations centers on tourism firms and perhaps also local authorities and other public institutions, particularly in the case of networks (Scott, Cooper, and Baggio 2008b; Merinero Rodriguez and Pulido Fernández 2009; Timur and Getz 2008). Two other groups of stakeholders—tourists and residents—are included less frequently. They are included in some of the cluster and systems conceptualizations (Manente and Cerato 2002a; Prats, Guia, and Molina 2008; Silvan Lira 2002; Varisco 2004), but it is with the portrayal of destinations as social constructs that tourists and residents are most directly and strongly acknowledged as active participants, not just in the cocreation of the tourist experience but also in that of the destination as a whole (Ringer 1998; Lemasson and Violier 2009; Saraniemi and Kylänen 2011). Writing from a district perspective, Sainaghi (2006) articulates the need for destination management organizations (DMOs) to take a metamanagement role.

**Dynamic Dimension**

Application of these different concepts to the study of destinations highlights their inherently dynamic nature. Some attention is given to the structural development of destinations in network analysis and through the growth of clusters in which changes in structure are analyzed with reference to factors such as the addition of new nodes and increasing density of relationships (Bernini 2009; Merinero Rodriguez and Pulido Fernández 2009; Pavlovich 2003; Thomazi 2006).

However, it is in terms of the factors that drive this evolution that these concepts provide a very useful complement to some of more traditional approaches to tourism development (Butler 1980). Viewed from a social construct perspective stressing cultural as well as economic processes, change is a core attribute of destinations as they are made and remade by multiple stakeholders (Lemasson and Violier 2009; Ringer 1998; Saraniemi and Kylänen 2011). According to Saarinen (1998, p. 160):

> The destination is not a stable, permanent socio-spatial structure, but a cultural landscape subject to continual transformation and reformation, in which it emerges, changes, disappears and re-emerges in varied forms. In this manner, destinations are institutionalized and de-institutionalized, reproducing social structures and meanings through the adopting and adaptation of previous ones.

In portraying destinations as complex adaptive systems, Baggio (2008) stresses their dynamic nature in terms of self-organization and self-similarity, robustness and resilience, and “edge of chaos” behavior. Becattini (1990) also suggests industrial districts are adaptive systems and that they evolve as entrepreneurs respond to market changes. Drawing on Becattini, Lazzaretti (2003, p. 641) develops the notion of “cultural districtualization” by focusing “on the one hand [on] economic and productive relations, and on the other socio-cultural ones, between local town community and industrial town community.” In the case of clusters, Porter (1998) argues that colocation and the resulting competition create the conditions to stimulate innovation. Innovation in turn produces change and clusters evolve to remain competitive. There has been relatively little exploration of these dynamic processes so far with regard to destinations but they would appear to be fruitful lines of enquiry (Bernini 2009; Capone 2006; Jackson and Murphy 2002; Michael 2003).

The studies reviewed also suggest that these elements are interrelated and that a destination might be conceptualized more fully as a dynamic, geographically based mode of production that provides interdependent and complementary products to tourists and transforms the spaces and places in which this production occurs.

Given the number of elements identified and the existing state of knowledge, it is beyond the scope of this paper to establish all relationships and to present a definitive integrative conceptual framework of destinations. Nevertheless, an initial framework might be offered that sets out some of the key relationships between the three dimensions and the higher-level elements (Figure 1). Figure 1 indicates that the mode of production and the geographic elements are closely linked and that both will change over time because of the various driving factors. The behavior of firms, for example, is influenced by the complementarity of colocated enterprises, the economies of scale and competition resulting from concentration, and by place characteristics that may engender trust. Structural change resulting from such behavior may in turn alter the spatial and place characteristics of the destination as communities there adapt and evolve. Similarly, the structure of the mode of production, the range of actors involved, and the process of change may be influenced by such spatial elements as external linkages. Moreover, the elements of each dimension will be interrelated: different actors, for example, may behave in different ways to produce different structural configurations of the mode of production.

The challenges in building on this framework result not only from the number of elements identified in Table 1 and
the correspondingly large number of possible relationships that might be explored but also from issues of operationalization that must be resolved if this conceptualization is to be validated by empirical analysis. Comprehensive empirical studies of destinations as systems, for example, have been hampered by the range of data and techniques needed to examine the multiple elements and relationships among them. Manente and Cerato (2000b) present and illustrate a methodology for studying a destination system and Baggio (2008) outlines a range of techniques for examining complex systems, but empirical research in this area has generally been confined to network analyses of actors using well-established techniques (Prats, Guia, and Molina 2008; Scott, Cooper and Baggio 2008a, 2008b). Although network analysis has been applied to issues such as identifying core-competencies (Denicola, Cioccarelli, and Zucchella 2010) and aspects of governance (Bodega, Cioccarelli, and Denicola 2004; Timur and Getz 2008), there are limitations in addressing elements other than those related to actors and the structural relationships between them.

The general difficulties of mapping and measuring clusters highlighted by Martin and Sunley (2003) are also apparent in the destination applications. Canina, Enz, and Harrison (2005) provide empirical support for ideas relating to colocation and the strategic dynamics of competitive clusters, and Bernini (2009) uses a series of indicators to derive a set of destination categories for her life-cycle analysis of Italian convention clusters, but many studies tend to assume boundaries and structures as given in relation to particular destinations when examining other cluster attributes (Cunha Barbosa and Aricó Zamboni 2001; Varisco 2004). The same is generally true of tourist districts although Aurioles, Fernández, and Manzanera (2008) do map different types of specialized tourist districts in Spain and detailed analyses of colocation have been undertaken at the level of districts within larger urban areas rather than in the sense of industrial districts (Pearce 1998).

Jackson and Murphy (2006) show how attitudes to competition and competitive behavior can be analyzed by employing various measures of cluster elements. Empirical diagnoses of destinations using cluster criteria show considerable variation in the extent to which particular destinations are actually functioning as effective clusters (Cunha Barbosa and Aricó Zamboni 2001; Jackson and Murphy 2002, 2006; Montero and Para 2001; Silvan Lira 2002; Thomazi 2006; Varisco 2004). Jackson and Murphy (2002, 2006), for example, found their Australian case studies largely corresponded to the conditions postulated by Porter (1998) but this was not the case in Miramar (Argentina) where Varisco (2004) identified a lack of innovation, integration, and interfirm articulation. Given the wider interest in competitive destinations, more empirical research is needed now to demonstrate the ways in which and extent to which the performance of destinations can be explained by particular concepts or elements.

**Implications for Destination Management**

Although the five concepts reviewed share common features such as the notion of interdependence and the need for cooperation, they also tend to emphasize different factors and highlight particular management issues with the result that none by itself is comprehensive. Conceptualizing destinations as networks, clusters, or districts, for example, tends to put the emphasis on interfirm or interorganizational relationships, issues that may be important in terms of who is to be managed and what form of destination management structure or governance is most appropriate. However, conceptualizing destinations in this way usually gives little weight to what is being managed (which products or experiences) and to the destination context (especially the inclusion of local residents, other sectors, and environmental factors). Although colocation of firms and activities is an underlying attribute of districts and clusters, their actual spatial structure is rarely detailed and made explicit. However, the physical layout and distribution of attractions, accommodation, transport, and other services is a major consideration when dealing with such commonly occurring issues as land-use planning, managing traffic congestion, visitor flows, and competition for shared spaces. In contrast, the geographical and other depictions of destinations as social constructs stress the role of local factors, emphasize engagement with and impact on residents, and highlight the way in which destinations are places transformed by and for tourism. Destination management from this stance would take a more holistic approach, reflect local particularities, and be more dynamic and agile.

Whether a destination is viewed as an open or closed system, as a subsystem within a larger whole, or as an entity complete in itself will also affect whether the activities of a DMO are primarily directed externally, internally, or whether some balance is sought. To what extent is the DMO...
concerned with developing an external image, promoting direct connections with the market, working through intermediaries in the value chain, fostering greater cohesiveness among local businesses, or ensuring quality assurance across a range of services. Recent studies in visitor information search and distribution, for example, emphasize the need to differentiate visitor behavior and activities that occur pretrip and in transit from those carried out at the destination (DiPietro et al. 2007). This gives rise to a corresponding need for a range of “in market” and “at destination” strategies, strategies that might be developed in a more integrated manner with an open systems model. Reciprocity is a feature of many spatial systems, that is, many places are both origins and destinations, a characteristic neglected by most other conceptualizations. This has significant but as yet largely unrecognized implications for destination management, especially for transport infrastructure and services where questions of linkages and capacity are a function of outbound as well as inbound demand. The role and impact of external factors on destination performance might also be better appreciated through adopting an open systems approach.

This attempt to develop a more comprehensive and generalized framework drawing on the five concepts allows a more holistic picture to emerge in terms of the range of destination management issues that might arise and how they might be addressed. Dealing with all issues might, of course, be beyond the resources or responsibility of any DMO or associated agency and issues may vary from destination to destination but having this larger framework will provide a sounder and more complete foundation on which decisions might be made regarding priorities, allocation of resources, and approaches to destination management.

Conclusions

This review has highlighted the wide range of studies that have adopted an explicit conceptual approach to destinations, identified the multiple elements used, and established some of the key relationships among them (Table 1 and Figure 1). Though the studies have been based on five different core concepts and carried out in different places and for different purposes, their theoretical underpinnings have been shown to be complementary and cumulative rather than incompatible and conflicting. As a result, the integrative conceptual framework presented constitutes a much more explicit and comprehensive conceptualization of destinations and contributes to filling a significant gap in the literature. In particular, the review and development of the framework has drawn attention to seeing destinations as a mode of production, a perspective treated in individual studies but one that emerges much more prominently here because of the systematic review of multiple concepts. The review has also shed light on the geographically complex nature of destinations, underlined their inherently dynamic nature, and outlined the breadth of factors that lead to their evolution. In these ways, the paper demonstrates the value of going beyond a descriptive or merely definitional approach to destination research to one that is conceptually based.

Certainly, much remains to be done in terms of refining the different elements, exploring the relationships among them, and testing the underlying assumptions. Given the multiplicity of elements identified and the range of potential relationships that exists, all aspects of the framework will not be able to be fleshed out in any particular study. However, the framework does provide a structure to guide future research and a context within which specific studies might be set so as to show more directly how they contribute to enriching our understanding of destinations. Considerable scope exists, for example, to develop techniques to analyse the structure of destinations by combining functional and spatial analyses, by complementing quantitative measures of behavior with the more qualitative approaches of the social constructionists and cultural geographers or by exploring the dynamics of destinations through multiple lenses.

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