

# The Stakeholders of Nautical Tourism Process in Destination Network: Topological Positions and Management Participation

## *Dionici nautičkog turističkog procesa u destinacijskoj mreži: topološke pozicije i sudjelovanje u upravljanju*

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### Summary

A tourist destination most often represents a complex and fragmented system of various stakeholders with interrelated interests that operate on a more or less network principle. Managing and synchronizing to all important destination stakeholders is a very important prerequisite for delivering a quality and competitive tourist product. It is also a very important balance between stakeholder participation in tourism activities / processes and involvement in key destination management decision making. An additional complexity in system synchronization is contributed by sub-network groups grouped around a specific and dominant tourist concept, in this case, nautical activities and processes in the destination. In this respect, it was important to investigate their topological position in relation to other destination stakeholders in order to assess the potential of their common influence on the central actors of destination management, i.e., key destination decision making. For this purpose, a total destination network analysis was performed and a separate analysis of the nautical stakeholder sub-network based on the mathematical graph of the social network and a correlation analysis of the obtained results / parameters of each of them with the level of their participation in key destination management decisions. The results of the analysis have shown that, unlike the general destination network, in the case of nautical sub-networks there is no statistically significant correlation between the topological position (potential of influence) and the level of participation in the most important destination management decisions. Specifically, their topological position is considerably more salient in relation to their participation in destination management decision-making, indicating their specific passivity in this regard and requiring new institutional and organizational solutions by central management structures.

### KEY WORDS

tourist destination  
stakeholder network centrality  
nautical sub-network  
topological position of stakeholders  
participation in decision making

### Sažetak

*Turistička destinacija najčešće predstavlja složen i fragmentiran sustav različitih dionika s isprepletenim interesima koji djeluju na više ili manje mrežnom principu. Upravljanje i usklađivanje sa svim važnim destinacijskim dionicima predstavlja vrlo važan preduvjet ta isporuku kvalitetnog i konkurentnog turističkog proizvoda. Pritom je vrlo važna ravnoteža između sudjelovanja dionika u turističkim aktivnostima/procesima i uključenosti u donošenju ključnih odluka destinacijskog upravljanja. Dodatnu složenost u usklađivanju sustava čine submreže dionika grupiranih oko specifičnog i dominantnog turističkog koncepta, u ovom slučaju nautičkih aktivnosti i procesa u destinaciji. U tom je smislu važno bilo istražiti njihovu topološku poziciju u odnosu na ostale destinacijske dionike kako bi se procijenio potencijal njihova zajedničkog utjecaja na središnje aktere destinacijskog upravljanja, odnosno na donošenje ključnih destinacijskih odluka. U tu svrhu provedena je ukupna analiza destinacijske mreže i zasebna analiza nautičke submreže dionika bazirane na matematičkom grafikonu društvene mreže te korelacijska analiza dobivenih rezultata/parametara svake od njih s razinom njihova sudjelovanja u ključnim destinacijskim upravljačkim odlukama. Rezultati analize pokazali su da, za razliku od dionika generalne destinacijske mreže, u dionika nautičke submreže ne postoji statistički značajna korelacija između njihove topološke pozicije (potencijala utjecajnosti) i razine sudjelovanja u najvažnijim destinacijskim upravljačkim odlukama. Konkretno, njihova je topološka pozicija znatno istaknutija u odnosu na sudjelovanje u destinacijskom upravljačkom odlučivanju, što upućuje na njihovu određenu pasivnost u tom pogledu te zahtijeva pronalazak novih institucionalnih i organizacijskih rješenja od strane središnjih upravljačkih struktura.*

### KLJUČNE RIJEČI

turistička destinacija  
centralnost mrežnih dionika  
nautički turizam  
topološka pozicija dionika  
sudjelovanje u odlučivanju

## 1. INTRODUCTION / Uvod

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon that involves the movement of people into countries or places beyond

their usual environment for personal or business / professional purposes. These people are called visitors (who can be tourists or excursionists, residents or non-residents) and tourism has to

do with their activities, some of which imply tourist costs (UNWTO, 2015).

The development of sustainable tourist destinations that can create the necessary social, cultural, economic and ecological effects requires a high level of interconnection between all interested parties (Timur & Getz, 2008), but it is widely acknowledged that managing effective interaction of stakeholders within tourist destinations is a task that is complex and challenging. The aim of this study is to explore the potential of specific groups of nautical tourism in structuring collaborative initiatives within tourist destinations in order to propose best practice and the preconditions for effective stakeholder engagement at the nautical destination level.

There are numerous advantages of co-operation of destination stakeholders in the tourism process that are manifested in positive outcomes for individual organizations and the destination as a whole. Collaboration enables individual organizations to enjoy the benefits of shared resource use and complementary capabilities within collective management, thereby enabling organizations to achieve more benefits if they act collectively rather than individually (Savage et al., 2010).

Given the highly fragmented and diverse nature of tourism, it is very important that all stakeholders synchronize their efforts and activities in the function of delivering a high quality tourist product. Page and Connell (2007) argue that public-private partnerships can help to exchange information, influence policy creation, and develop new products. It can even achieve a competitive edge. Furthermore, according to Edgell et al. (2008), the more stakeholders in decision-making regarding tourism, the more likely it will lead to positive economic, environmental and social impacts, such as enhancing identity in the local heritage, increased self-confidence, global recognition and innovative thinking. In planning tourism, it is important that those who will be involved or affected by tourism deserve also that "their voice to be heard" especially when they know the destination well and can help with its planning (Page & Connell, 2007). This can also reduce conflicts within the local community and antagonize some of the less attractive tourism related appearances.

A significant number of public and private stakeholders are involved in the tourist destination management. Their involvement in tourism covers activities ranging from natural resource management to marketing of tourism services. For these activities, the transfer of knowledge and diffusion of innovation are of great importance (Hjalager, 2002). This is through various channels and streams of knowledge and information between government agencies and private stakeholders, and between private stakeholders and tourists who are permeated by push and pull mechanisms (Lally, O'Donovan & Quinlan, 2013).

So far there has been no research in the area of destination sub-networks covering actors (stakeholders) as providers of services of particular interest in tourism such as those from the domain of nautical activities. There is also an open question on the involvement of these actors in the most important management processes and decisions of the destination as a whole. For this purpose it is necessary to carry out the analysis of the destination network as a whole based on the mathematical graph of the social network, in which the actors are represented by nodes and the attributes of their links with edges.

Given the above, the most important research questions are summarized by the following:

1. What are the most important actors (stakeholders) of the nautical tourism process as sub-network and the destination

network as a whole?

2. What is the topological position of nautical sub-network actors in the whole destination network?
3. What is their involvement in management processes and decisions important for the whole destination?
4. Is there a correlation between their topological position and involvement in the most important management processes and decisions at the general destination level?

## 2. NAUTICAL TOURISM IN REPUBLIC OF CROATIA / *Nautički turizam u Republici Hrvatskoj*

Nautical tourism is a specific form of tourism that characterizes tourists traveling by water, either by sea or river, and their consent to the marina and port, specially designed for the reception of this type of tourists, for rest and recreation. Favourable climate, unspoiled nature, attractive and rugged coastline are the main advantages for the Croatian development of this kind of tourism, but the natural beauty is not enough for its development. The quality, equipment and infrastructure itself of Croatian harbour and marina, still greatly lags behind other countries that nautical constant investment each year boosts its ports and marinas to raise to a higher level. It is possible to distinguish two types of factors that largely determine the competitiveness of nautical tourism in relation to the environment. These factors are (Gračan, Gregorić & Martinić, 2016):

- General (fixed) – climatic conditions (sunny days, the frequency and intensity of the wind, air and water temperatures), beauty and purity of the sea, the beauty of the landscape which includes indented and diversified coast and islands with settlements;
- Special (variable) – transport accessibility of the starting port in relation to the main markets, personal safety and the safety of navigation, number, spatial distribution and facilities in marinas, and the ability to link the ship in the marina and outside it, the kindness and education of staff, offer other facilities necessary for maintenance and equipment of the ship to sail, the attractiveness of the content on the land, the cost of services, legislation related to navigation and stationing ships, taxes (Bartoluci and Skoric 2009, 127).

Nautical tourism covers an entire range of activities, given that boaters are not stationary and the dominant characteristics of guests are their mobility as well. Nautical tourism is a multifunctional tourist activity with a strong maritime component that is involved in nautical tourism as a tourism phenomenon, based on seagoing vessels and ports. The interest of investors for nautical tourism in the world, including the Republic of Croatia, is due to the high macro and micro profitability that is the result of a positive impact of many other tourist activities. It is considered twice as big as the consumption of "traditional" tourists. Due to the significant revenues of Croatian nautical tourism and its recognisability on the world market, there is an increasing interest of foreign investors, which is also accompanied by the development of complementary tourism activities and the overall external promotion of Croatia. Thus, Croatian nautical tourism has all the initial predispositions for intensifying investment (Jadrešić 2001 67 and Luković, Gržetić 2007, 267).

## 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW / *Teorijska pozadina i pregled literature*

Recently, in the scientific and research community, there are more and more questions of synchronization of the most important stakeholders of the destination community in order to find an adequate model of effective destination management. Particularly

important are issues of appropriate representation of all major actors in the management processes and decisions in line with their topological position in the destination network.

An overview of existing literature has provided conceptual clarification of factors influencing stakeholders' level of commitment and a range of possible impacts that can provide an effective stakeholder engagement to tourist organizations, destinations and regions. The topic of stakeholder engagement has attracted many academic circles in many different perspectives. Tourism is a fragmented sector that requires the purpose of coordination to ensure coherence of perception and service delivery (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007). The cumulative synergistic effect of individual stakeholders in the destination significantly exceeds their simple mathematical sum.

The primary challenge for modern tourist managers is to harmonize the dynamic, competitive forces, interests and resources of different stakeholder groups through effective structuring of inter-organizational relationships (Lally, O'Donovan & Quinlan, 2013). March & Wilkinson (2009) confirm that the success of the destination is realized through the interaction of its stakeholders, the way in which stakeholders interact and communicate with each other. Destinations, not individual providers, are units of the tourist choice (competitive framework) for contemporary consumers (Baggio & Cooper, 2010). Integral destination experience is increasingly recognized as a key source of competitive advantage (King, 2002). Tourism co-operation can often include issues such as tourism policy, destination management, product development, branding and promotion as well as sustainability.

A key role in managing inter-organizational co-operation is the Destination Management Organization (DMO). Atorough & Martin (2012) views DMO as an independent organization, a representative of interest in a collective destination that facilitates co-operation towards a common goal and thus makes the personified willingness of the destination to sacrifice individual interest in the common good. Meriläinen and Lemmetyinen (2011) suggest that the role of the DMO is to engage and connect the destination parties through interaction to facilitate and direct the collaborative effort.

However, the competitiveness of a tourist destination is fundamentally dependent on the efficiency of the engagement, i.e. the collaborative synergy of the stakeholders, which again rests on their structure and management of their interactions (Nordin & Svensson, 2007, Baggio, Scott & Cooper, 2010). Management of stakeholders includes methods and opportunities through which they interact in the destination and their contributions are balanced (Baggio, Scott & Cooper, 2010).

In destination management, it is very important to define the degree of centralization / decentralization within the mechanisms of engagement and stakeholder coordination. The degree of centralization of decision-making within the destination, among other things, is also based on balancing controls and manifestations of power within the destination. The density and centrality of the network affect the strategies of individual reflection on the imbalance of power. The density refers to the degree of mutual linkage of the stakeholders, while the centrality refers to the relative position of the stakeholders, their number of connections, the level of access and the degree of control that they carry out each other (Lally, O'Donovan & Quinlan, 2015). High-density stakeholders can lead to cooperative coalitions, which in turn can affect a more uniform pressure in destination decision-making, as

opposed to fragmented low density where the network is more likely to conflict and as such reduced the ability to influence central actors (Rowley, 1997). In this respect, it would also be necessary to investigate the density of some subgroups of stakeholders linking the common concept of tourism products delivery in order to assess the potential of their common influence on the central actors of destination management or key destination decisions making.

By insight into destination structure, it is possible to define the administrative or coordinating framework of action, but ultimately the policy and practice of convening and listing the operating sets of DMOs and determining the levels of stakeholder participation (Lally, O'Donovan & Quinlan, 2015). Stakeholder engagement is defined as the practice that the organization assumes in stakeholder engagement (Greenwood, 2007) and differs from the stakeholders' own integration which represents the entity's strategic capacity to establish positive cooperative relationships with a wide variety of stakeholders (Plaza-Ubeda, Burgos-Jimenez & Carmona-Moreno, 2010). Communication can be a key element of engagement activity and its prerequisite (Koschmann, Kuhn & Pfarrer, 2012), so the intensity and frequency of communication can be seen as an indicator of proactivity in relationship development (Plaza-Ubeda et al., 2010).

The aforementioned preconditions for stakeholder engagement in the destination (information dissemination, collaborative relationships, decision speeds, frequency of communication etc.) derive from the attributes of their interrelationships, i.e. they can be recognized by interpreting the obtained centrality measures on the social network graph as part of the overall analysis of their destination (Bonacich, 1987; Hanneman, 2001; Baggio, 2008). Here, first of all, we mean the degree of centrality, the closeness and between of nodes (actors), eigenvector centrality and the clustering coefficient.

Internet and social networks largely overcome many of the limitations of communication that could sometimes be attributed to time and distance, thus increasing the communication potential within stakeholder engagement initiatives and giving the DMO the ability to build interactive and collaborative relationships between real-time stakeholders (Svendson & Laberge, 2005; Bhat & Guar, 2012).

Co-operation among destination stakeholders provides added value to destinations through collective acquisition of knowledge that can stimulate and enhance innovation and adaptability in a dynamic competitive environment (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999). Therefore, achieving common values of the destination depends on the existence of productive links between its stakeholders and the common belief of their interdependence (Savage et al., 2010).

Wang (2008) identified a number of factors that are often an obstacle for certain stakeholders in accessibility to destinations management structures such as perceived lack of information, lack of time or available staff, and in some cases the perception that the agenda or activities of the destination co-ordination body are too rigid and require specially tailored approaches for subgroups or stakeholders.

In this respect, it is also necessary to observe the subgroup of the stakeholders of nautical tourism, which deserves a customized approach, for which, among other things, a very important insight and understanding of their structures and topological positions.

The representativeness and legitimacy of stakeholder engagement activities is of crucial importance, and membership

in the group may also be a potential source of dissatisfaction or resistance. In this context, particular attention should be paid to the extent to which the nominal representatives of a group of stakeholders are indeed the actual (practical) representatives of that group (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999). In particular, DMOs should be cautious of the dangers of perceiving the participation of many stakeholders represented by them (Shortall, 1994). Membership fluctuation, change in goals, and pace of change further increase the complexity of stakeholder engagement, which can create ambiguity in membership, status and representativeness (Huxham & Vangen, 2000), thus reducing the overall desire to engage among destination stakeholders.

The balance between actively involved stakeholders and the passive community is of crucial importance for the legitimacy of destination networks and can lead to destabilizing issues if it is not resolved in a timely manner (Dredge, 2006). Although most DMOs can never reach or strive to achieve the conditions of full democracy in decision-making, they should always be aware of the dangers of implicit or explicit tokenism (symbolic representation).

It is therefore very important to investigate whether a certain subgroup of stakeholders is adequately represented in making decisions that are of utmost importance for tourism destinations.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY / Metodologija

In the first phase of data collection to identify the most important targeting actors, a questionnaire was used according to the snowball sampling model. After defining the list of stakeholders, the survey questionnaire was used the Likert scale (1 through 5) to identify the frequency and attributes of their mutual contacts in destination processes and activities on one side and involvement in the processes of making the most important decisions in the destination on the other.

For the purpose of this paper, it was important first to identify the actors of nautical tourism and the direct processes related to it (the supplier and institution representative) and then, according to the referral method, to ask each and every actor to declare about other important actors in destination tourism.

After that, a Social Network Analysis (hereinafter ADM) was carried out with the calculation of the centrality of the positions of the concerned actors represented by nodes on the graph of the social network in the most parameters (dimensions) of which were most important:

- degree centrality
- closeness centrality,
- betweenness centrality,
- eigenvector centrality,
- cluster coefficient.

After the obtained parameters, normalization (standardization) of the data on the probability curve and their arithmetic mean as the aggregate indicator of the topological positions of the actors (nodes) on the graph of the social network was performed. This is a precondition for the regularity of the correlation of these data with the frequency of participation of actors at key management destination meetings, which is also measured by the Likert scale (one to five). SPSS 21.0 software was used for the purposes of data processing as well as subsequent correlation analysis.

Finally, a simple correlation analysis was conducted to define the adequacy of the participation of stakeholders in nautical tourism processes in the most important decisions based on their topological position (centrality position) in the entire destination network.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION / Rezultati i diskusija

The first indicators refer to the structure of destination networks with all their major stakeholders (nodes), or interest groups, and their topological position based on the attributes of their connection. The data presented in Table and Figure 1. The question of the completeness of the actor list and the relevant data related to them is solved in two ways: by applying a snowball method or by referring chains to nominating new actors until saturation of the list (repeating names) Morgan, 2008).

In the same procedure, data on the frequencies of interconnection of actors were obtained on official and unofficial basis, which could be used to measure the relevant indicators of the centrality of their position on the social network graph: the eigenvector of centrality, clustering coefficient, closeness, betweenness and degree centrality. These data were processed, analysed and visualized using Gephi 0.9.1. The obtained results based on which the composite variable - topological position (Bonacich, 1987) - was created and are presented in Table 1 and are visualized in Figure 1.

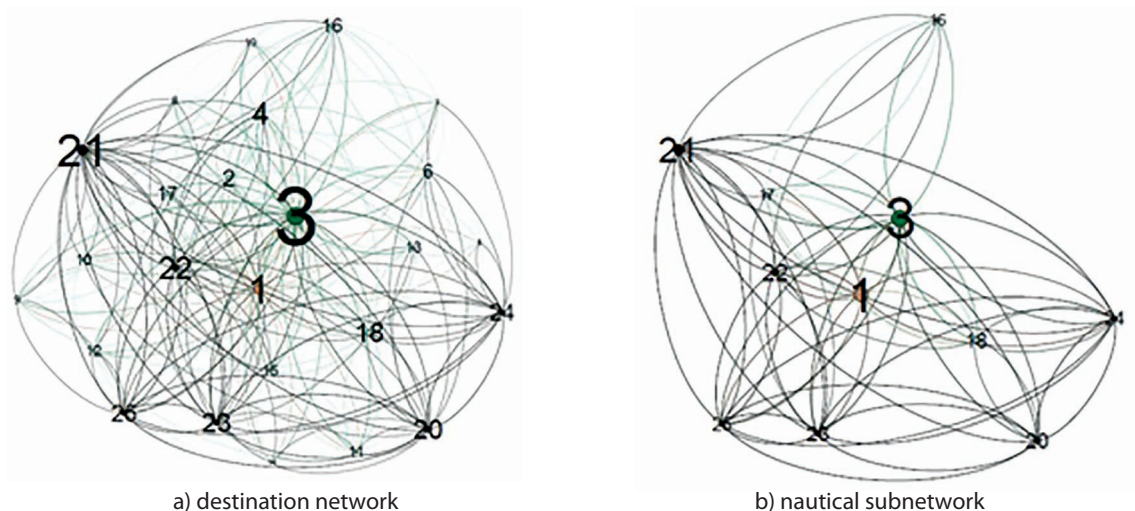
In order to evaluate the relationship between the centrality of the position and the participation in the managing process of the nautical actor (supplier) of the nautical tourism in the destination, the Pearson correlation coefficient of the observed sample was calculated, the result of which is shown in Table 2.

### 5.1. Topological structure and position of actors in the destination network / Topološka struktura i pozicija aktera u destinacijskoj mreži

By implementation of an adequate data collection method (referral chain reference in the form of snowballs, the list of 25 actors (252 interconnections) of the whole destination network and 9 actors (44 interconnections) of the subnetwork nautical tourism process is completed, of which 6 are the most active participants in the same activities. They are represented by numbers: 20 (ACI), 21 (charter yachting companies), 22 (marine management), 23 (maintenance service provider), 24 (marine trade) and 25 (event companies).

The graphs shown in the network of observed destinations are visualized so that the numbers represent the same actors (nodes in the network) whose font proportionally reflects the degree of centrality (connection with neighbouring actors), and the number of lines reflects the frequency of their connection. According to the principle, it is noticeable that the actors most directly involved in the nautical tourism process, represented by numbers 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25, have a salient topological position (the average degree of centrality is 23,333), and particularly the charter 21 representing charter company. The most prominent position is the only actor 1 representing the City Administration and actor 3 representing the local DMO. Concrete data for the degree of centrality as well as other centrality parameters defining the topological position of the actors in the destination network are shown in Table 1.

From the table 1 it is also apparent that the parameter of the coefficient of clustering (grouping) is slightly on the nautical subnetwork side (0.543) in relation to the whole destination network (0.525), which is a relatively negative indicator, because it would be logical to expect that, due to the thematic unification of nautical tourism concept and the consistency of the delivered tourist product, is significantly higher. It also suggests that it is desirable to have a more significant grouping within the given subfolder in order to effect its stronger collective impact on the processes and decisions in the destination as a whole (Lally, O'Donovan & Quinlan,



Source: Authors of the work

Figure 1 Topological structure of the destination network and nautical subnetwork

Slika 1. Topološka struktura aktera destinacijske mreže i nautičke submreže

Table 1 Topological characteristic of destination networks

Tablica 1. Topološke karakteristike destinacijskih mreža

Network topology	Actor numb.	Numb. of links between actors	Avg. degree centrality	Avg. path distance	Avg. cluster coefficient	Eigenvector centrality
Destination network	25	252	20,160	1,580	0,525	1,640
Nautical network	9	44	23,333	1,389	0,543	4,446

Source: Authors of the work

2015). Another important indicator - the average eigenvector centrality - is significant on the nautical subnetwork side (4,446), which can have a conditional positive effect on the collective power and influence of the actors. Conditional, because the eigenvector centrality reflects the number of adjoining relationships with actors who themselves also have a large number of adjoining relationships with third actors and thus, in the nature of things, are less dependent on the primary actor (node on the graph of the social network), thereby naturally reducing its influence and power (Bonacich, 1987; Hanneman, 2001).

## 5.2. Participation of nautical subnetwork actors in the destination management decisions / Sudjelovanje aktera nautičke submreže u upravljačkim odlukama u destinaciji

As presented in chapter three (Methodology) of this paper, a final insight into the appropriateness of the participation of nautical subnetwork actors in the most important destination management meetings. After the data collected, the correlation between the topological position (potential influence) and the participation in destination decisions was performed, the results of which were presented in Table 2

From the table 2, there is a significant correlation ( $p < 0.001$ ) that is,  $r = 0.706$ . on the basis of which it can be assumed that the participation of the actors of the entire destination network in the main control processes is quite matched with their topological position.

Table 2 Correlation between topological position (potential influence) and participation in destination decisions

Tablica 2. Korelacija između topološke pozicije (potencijalne utjecajnosti) i sudjelovanja u destinacijskim odlukama

	Variable	N	M	SD	POS	PART
Destination network	Position (POS)	25	,000	,706	-	
	Participation (PART)	25	,000	1,000	,606*	-
Nautical subnetwork	Position (POS)	9	,000	,741	-	
	Participation (PART)	9	,000	1,000	,431**	-

Statistical significance : \* $p < 0,001$ ; \*\* $p = 0,247$

On the other hand, in the case of nautical subnetworks, this correlation has no statistical significance because the same amounts,  $p = 0.247$  which is significantly more than the limit value ( $p < 0.05$ ). Among other things, it is possible to conclude that these actors are quite passive in participating in decision-making when making the most important decisions in the destination, relative to their topological position or participation in operational tourism processes.

## 6. CONCLUSION / Zaključak

In the tourist destination management are extremely important, cooperation, synchronization and inclusion of destination stakeholders in the tourism process given their significant fragmentation (Savage et al., 2010), in order to be delivered a high quality tourist product.

Management of stakeholders includes methods and opportunities through which they interact in the destination and their contributions should be balanced (Baggio, Scott & Cooper, 2010). So it is about network system or a social network of stakeholders where they can intertwine their influences that can be determined with their topological position. An important question is how many stakeholders are involved in making the most important decisions for tourism destinations and whether it is in line with their topological position i.e. the frequency of realized connections with other relevant stakeholders in tourism processes and activities in the destination. In other words, do they adequately use their positioning potential to participate in decision-making. In this paper, the focus of the analysis is based on the submersion of nautical tourism stakeholders in the destination and the adequacy of their participation in overall destination decision-making.

After the survey performed, a social network analysis of all destination stakeholders was carried out using the social network graph analysis method. The data are systematized into two groups - at the level of the whole destination network and in particular at the subnetwork of nautical activities. Finally, correlations were calculated for each group separately, and comparisons were made between them. Sublimated results showed that in the case of so-called nautical subnetwork stakeholders, there is no statistically significant correlation between their topological position and the level of participation in key destination decision making, as opposed to the stakeholders of the whole destination network, where there is a moderate to significant correlation. Consequently, it is possible to conclude that the actors of nautical tourism are rather passive in most important destination decision-making participating relative to their topological position, i.e. participation in operational tourism processes. Such a mismatch suggests, inter alia, the need to consider introducing a new, more flexible institutional and organizational system in managing such a destination.

The contribution of this paper is to find adequate techniques and tools for destination managers in the discovery of possible imbalances between the participation of particular stakeholders of destination network (in this case nautical sub-network) in tourism operational processes and their participation in destination decision making. However, apart from the aforementioned contribution, there are certain limitations, which are primarily reflected in the research on a specific and limited sample. Therefore, due to external validity, similar research should be conducted at other destinations of different qualitative and geographic character.

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