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## **Brokers and Saboteurs**

Actor Roles in Destination Innovation Network Development

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## **Brokers and Saboteurs: Actor Roles in Destination**

### **Innovation Network Development**

**Abstract:** In many tourist destinations, innovation network development is complicated because relevant actors have divergent interests with respect to destination development. This article reports a longitudinal case study of a destination innovation network within a small tourist destination. The network in question formed in spite of fierce conflict between destination actors. The article illustrates how different network actor roles make innovation network development possible, and how other roles make it troublesome. The findings emphasise how the right mix, timing, and interplay of various actor roles is crucial for innovation network building in conflict-dominated tourist destinations.

**Keywords:** network, innovation, destination, roles, conflict, case study

## Introduction

Innovation often relies on networks in which actors, their knowledge, and other resources are joined (Ahuja, 2000; Boschma & Frenken, 2010; Håkansson & Ford, 2002; Lee et al., 2010). In tourist destinations, tourism businesses—as well as other businesses, organisations, local populations, and authorities—rely on shared resources (Briassoulis, 2002; Healy, 1994). There are, consequently, benefits of local destination networks; for example, in terms of coordination of activities, knowledge distribution, and innovation (e.g., Beritelli, 2011; Pechlaner et al., 2015; Pechlaner, Baggio, et al., 2010; Pechlaner, Presenza, et al., 2010; Sørensen & Fuglsang, 2014). However, destinations are often characterised by conflict rather than cooperation due to the presence of competition among tourism companies, and for shared resources between actors with different interests and strategies (e.g., Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Beritelli, 2011; Beritelli & Bieger, 2014; Haugland et al., 2011; Sørensen, 2007).

This article presents the study of an extreme case—a small tourist destination—in which an innovation network developed in spite of conflict between destination actors. Authors X and Y (anonymised reference for peer review) have described the relevance of one particular role in the destination's network building process (the role of “diplomat”) in a comparative destination study. However, the current article examines and discusses how a variety of actor roles and the right mix and interplay of roles made innovation network development possible in the destination, and how other actor roles complicated such network development. Thus, the article focuses on two related network issues: network dynamics, and different network actor roles in such dynamics. Network dynamics is a neglected theme in innovation network research (Ahuja et al., 2012). In spite of the dynamic nature of tourism, this neglect is also evident in tourism research (however, see Gibson et al., 2007; Pavlovich, 2003; Sørensen & Fuglsang, 2014; Zehrer & Raich, 2010). Different actor roles in innovation

networks have been investigated to some degree; examples include network entrepreneurs, brokers (Burt, 2000, 2005), managers (Landsperger et al., 2012), and boundary spanners (Klerkx & Leeuwis, 2009). However, little is known about how combinations and interactions of actor roles influence innovation network development, not least in areas dominated by conflict between relevant actors. Such knowledge is crucial for private and public actors involved in planning and developing innovation networks in tourist destinations. Thus, the research question underpinning this article is: How do different interplaying roles of network actors affect innovation network development in tourist destinations dominated by conflict?

The article first presents the theoretical background, including perspectives on innovation networks related to issues such as trust, exploration, exploitation, and actor roles. The method is then presented, followed by the case and the analysis. Finally, the main conclusions are outlined.

## **Theoretical background**

This section first presents the dynamics, structures, and different actor roles emphasised in network theory. This is followed by a discussion of possible actor roles in destination innovation network development.

### ***Structures, dynamics, and roles in networks***

Innovation network theory has emphasised the relevance of network structures for knowledge distribution (most notably, Burt, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1973) and innovation processes (Ahuja, 2000). Strong and dense networks have been argued to rely on and facilitate trust (e.g., Coleman, 1988). Frequent contact among actors in such networks results in the

development of a common knowledge base that, combined with strong structural interdependence, limits the benefits of opportunistic behaviour (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Conversely, sparse and weaker networks may not lead to the same level of trust, but may give broad access to inspiration and information; however, they may also be utilised by actors to seek personal benefits and to play other actors against each other (Burt, 2000). Thus, the two network types may lead to different types of knowledge distribution and innovation processes: exploitation or exploration. Exploration is concerned with search, variation, risk-taking, experimentation, play, flexibility, and discovery. Exploitation is concerned with refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, and execution (March, 1991). Strong ties, especially in cohesive and closed networks, have been argued to support exploitation, while weak ties, especially in open network structures, facilitate exploration (Burt, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Gilsing & Duysters, 2008; Lavie & Rosenkopf, 2006; March, 1991; Sørensen & Mattsson, 2016), partly because exploitation in networks requires a higher level of trust between actors compared to exploration.

Networks are collections of relationships, and are therefore fluid and constantly changing (Pavlovich, 2003). However, knowledge about how and why networks evolve is limited. Consequently, there is a dearth of studies on outcomes of networks (Ahuja et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the dynamism of entrepreneurs' and start-up companies' networks has received some attention and has been illustrated to vary by entrepreneurial phase (Jack, 2010). Elfring and Hulsink (2007) suggested that how start-up companies' networks develop depends on whether companies pursue radical or incremental innovation. Radical innovations demand loose networks in the start-up phase, but become stronger as the innovation consolidates. The opposite sequence is observed in spin-offs pursuing incremental innovations that rely on established knowledge, where looser networks are built later in the innovation process to reach potential customers (Elfring & Hulsink, 2007). This indicates how

radical innovation processes initially rely on exploration and loose networks, whereas exploitation and more cohesive networks take over as the innovation is being developed in detail and implemented. Exploration is the more relevant term to describe the activities related to early stages (search and selection) of an innovation process, whereas exploitation best captures the activities of later stages (development and implementation). This suggests that innovation networks may evolve from open and sparse configurations to more closed and dense ones, in which trust becomes crucial, during innovation processes (Sørensen & Mattsson, 2016).

However, effective collaboration in networks entails challenges arising from actors' contrasting cultures, norms, and values; cognitive and geographic distances; varying capacities and differing objectives; as well as “system gaps”—that is, lack of fit between a proposed innovation and the broader system (Dooley & O'Sullivan, 2007; Klerkx & Leeuwis, 2009). Such challenges affect efficiency of communication, knowledge development, and learning in networks. The challenges may vary with developmental phases of networks. The challenges encountered in initial explorative phases of innovation network collaboration—the fuzzy front end of innovation—may be particularly important and can arise from a lack of clear product concepts; uncertainties about customer needs and relevant technologies; as well as a lack of trust (Colombo et al., 2011; Jörgensen et al., 2011; Kessler & Chakrabarti, 1999).

To overcome such challenges, roles of different actors can be important for network development. Burt's (2000) network entrepreneur, for example, thrives on loose networks in which he/she can extract personal benefits by maintaining a central and powerful position in a loose network. Conversely, product-innovating entrepreneurs will attempt to develop stronger networks to sustain business development (see Elfring & Hulsink, 2007). While the above and similar studies have focused on roles of actors seeking personal benefits from networks, other studies have emphasised roles of actors with a greater focus on more collective benefits of

networks. Network managers, for example, have the task of facilitating communication; ensuring trust, commitment and harmony; and coordinating tasks and resources (Landsperger et al., 2012). Similarly, Dhanarag and Parkhe (2006) emphasised that hub firms are responsible for managing network design, structure, and stability, and knowledge distribution and appropriability. Other organisations may play similar roles but possess other positions in networks; for example, as “superstructure organisations”, which provide collective goods and coordinate information flows (Lynn et al., 1996), or “systemic intermediaries”, which include funding bodies and research institutions (Howells, 2006; Klerkx & Leeuwis, 2009) that facilitate initial network building by bringing actors into contact with each other, brokering relations, and reducing uncertainty. Such superstructure organisations and systemic intermediaries function as glue holding networks together by enhancing trust and resolving conflicts (Klerkx & Leeuwis, 2009). At the individual level, similar roles have been attributed to “boundary spanners” and “network brokers”. These actors are characterised as diplomatic, tolerant, reliable, and committed, and can bring unlikely people together by seeing things in a different way, building trust, and acting as interaction coordinators (Klerkx & Leeuwis, 2009).

Thus, actors can perform different roles in network building processes; however, less has been said about actors who perform activities that are more network hostile, such as working deliberately against innovation network building. However, it can be suggested that such actors may possess opposite characteristics of boundary spanners, network brokers, intermediaries, etc.; that is, they may exhibit intolerance, distrust, and suspicion, and seek to induce such among other actors, attempting to obstruct relations instead of brokering them. These actors may have cultures, interests, and norms that are incompatible with those of the network building actors.

Furthermore, little knowledge exists about how different actor roles affect innovation network building processes by operating in concert, and how they may do so during different phases of innovation processes—for instance, during explorative and exploitative phases. Nevertheless, understanding such roles and processes can be crucial in sectors such as tourism, particularly since conflict often thrives in tourist destinations.

### ***Destination innovation network development and actor roles***

Some attention has been paid by tourism research to network structures (McLeod et al., 2010; Pavlovich, 2003), geographies of networks (Sørensen, 2007), and destination networks (Baggio & Cooper, 2010; Gibson et al., 2007; Pavlovich, 2003). Destinations contain interdependent firms within one “economic sector”, and the proximity and common interests of these firms can enable destination networks to form (Baggio & Cooper, 2010; Milne et al., 1998). Two primary dichotomic destination models exist (along with many intermediary types): (a) a community model, characterised by numerous autonomous tourism companies; and (b) a corporate model, characterised by a single or a few actors. Collaboration and networking is particularly relevant in the community model (Pechlaner et al., 2015); such destinations can be conceptualised as networks of connected public and private stakeholders (Baggio & Cooper, 2010). Thus, for some research purposes, the destination network is a more useful unit of analysis compared to considering individual stakeholders (Pechlaner, Baggio, et al., 2010).

Local destination networks are considered important, especially for smaller tourism firms (Gibson et al., 2007; Hjalager, 2010; Zehrer & Raich, 2010). They facilitate face-to-face contact, thereby enhancing distribution of tacit knowledge and exploitation (e.g., Boschma & Frenken, 2010; Breschi & Lissoni, 2001; Camagni, 1995). Simultaneously, networks are themselves facilitated by communication and commitment among actors location in



destinations (Ramayah et al., 2011). Communication and coordination in destination networks influence tourism actor and destination performance (Ramayah et al., 2011), productivity, growth (Pechlaner, Baggio, et al., 2010), innovation (Buhalis & Cooper, 1998; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001; Pechlaner, Baggio, et al., 2010; Pechlaner et al., 2015; Sørensen, 2007; Tremblay, 1998), sustainable destination planning and development, project realisation, the establishment of governance structures (Beritelli, 2011), and destination marketing (Pechlaner, Presenza, et al., 2010).

A combination of collaboration and competition, or coopetition, characterises many business networks (Peng & Bourne, 2009; Wilhelm & Sydow, 2018). Further, different networks may collaborate while also being competitors; for example, when they provide access to non-competing markets (Peng & Bourne, 2009). In tourism, such coopetition between actors and networks is observed, for example, as collaboration between international hotel networks within destinations when non-competitive benefits can be achieved (Sørensen, 2007). Such coopetition and local cohesion within destinations sustain the spread of knowledge (Gibson et al., 2007; Halme, 2001; McLeod et al., 2010), leading to an increase in destinations' competitiveness (Pechlaner, Baggio, et al., 2010).

Tourism networks are dynamic and constantly evolving. Tourism companies' weak networks have been observed to facilitate idea generation and exploration, whereas stronger networks of close collaborations facilitate the development of innovations and exploitation. Such networks evolve as needs for exploration and exploitation change (Sørensen & Fuglsang, 2014). At the destination level, strong networks can facilitate exploitation while weaker networks can support exploration (Sørensen, 2007). Furthermore, destinations go through destination life-cycles (Butler, 2006); throughout such life-cycles, destination networks develop and change (Pavlovich, 2003; Zehrer & Raich, 2010). Destinations may

therefore experience periods of close collaboration and destination-based innovation, and other periods without such networking and innovation.

Partly related to this, some empirical studies have observed close collaboration within destinations (e.g., Eide & Fuglsang, 2013). However, other studies have found limited collaboration therein; these include quantitative studies that have measured, for example, destination networks' density and clustering coefficients (e.g., Pechlaner, Baggio, et al., 2010), as well as qualitative studies (e.g., Bærenholdt et al., 2004). Such studies have emphasised a range of challenges with respect to destination network formation. First, destinations can suffer from the tragedy of the commons, the prisoner's dilemma, the challenge of collective action, and free-riding (Beritelli, 2011; Hjalager, 2000). Second, tourism firms' characteristics can limit destination networks (Bærenholdt et al., 2004); for example, smaller tourism firms, in particular, focus on day-to-day tasks rather than on building local networks (McLeod et al., 2010; Zehrer & Raich, 2010). It has been argued that such companies, do not realise that their product is part of the larger tourism experience (Tremblay, 2000). Third, different firms—for example, hotels and attractions—possess and require different types of information and knowledge for innovation (Sørensen, 2007), and firms within the same sub-sectors—for example, hotels—may perceive each other as competitors rather than as cooperators (A. Hjalager, 2002). Fourth, empirical studies have indicated that destination actors vary in their perceptions of favourable development trajectories since their business and political logics differ (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014). Such logics extend beyond tourism systems, because tourism also affects local populations and actors in other industries. Local-interest groups (e.g., second homeowners' associations), non-tourism businesses (e.g., retail), and business organisations may have particular interests in tourism, or in using the same resources as those used in tourism for other purposes. Thus, different actors with potentially conflicting interests can partake in—or have a motivation to

influence—destination innovation network building processes. In turn, the potential for different destinations to form collaborative networks varies (Tremblay, 2000; Zehrer & Raich, 2010), and depends on the homogeneity, size, and type of tourism firms; their spatial configuration; the type of destination; and the competitive situation (Ioannides & Debagge, 1998; Tremblay, 2000).

When destinations are characterised by disagreements among actors with divergent interests, norms, cultures, etc., this may limit trust and complicate innovation network building. Trust is related to networking, while mistrust—expressed as stereotyping and disrespect—can make it difficult to develop beneficial network relations (Ramayah et al., 2011). Further, Beritelli (2011) suggested that trust between actors leads to collaboration patterns that do not follow rational theoretic principles. Thus, collective initiatives are sometimes not realised despite a rational economic logic, and destination actors adhere less to formal rules and norms of cooperation and more to key actors and past individual experience. Therefore, existing bonds of trust, understanding, reciprocal sympathy, and communication among actors influence the potential to create collective action (Beritelli, 2011).

Consequently, there may often be a need for actors performing roles that can help overcome network barriers, including boundary spanners or network brokers (e.g., tourism consultants), network managers, superstructure organisations, or intermediary bodies (e.g., destination management organisations). Different roles that such actors can play can be crucial in exploratory phases, or the fuzzy front end, of tourism innovation processes, in which initial development of consensus is crucial for establishing innovation networks; and in the exploitative phases, in which trust between actors is essential to cement and promote collaboration. Other important network actor roles include those of business entrepreneurs, who often develop and implement innovations. Conversely, other actors with conflicting interests, as well as free-riders, may limit the destination innovation network building

potential. Such actors may include other tourism businesses, businesses in other sectors, and more or less powerful local-interest organisations.

Because of the many interests and potential network barriers at play, a complex combination of network actor roles is likely to both favour and hinder destination innovation network development. However, while Pechlaner, Presenza et al. (2010) emphasised the role of “facilitators” in tourism—that is, actors that orchestrate and manage networks that support cooperation, and sharing, acquiring, and deploying knowledge among actors—extant research has not indicated how combinations of network actor roles determine whether destination innovation network building succeeds. Thus, the exploratory case study presented in the following sections fills part of this knowledge gap. It illustrates how a mix of different network actor roles impacted innovation network building in a small destination.

## **Method**

This study applies qualitative, case-based research to study a destination network. Network research to date has relied on mathematics-based social network analysis, physicists’ approaches, and qualitative approaches (Baggio et al., 2010). Much tourism network research belongs to the first two types (e.g., Baggio & Cooper, 2010; Beritelli et al., 2013; Pechlaner, Presenza, et al., 2010; Scott et al., 2008); however, numerous case studies, including innovation studies relying on qualitative interviews and observations, also exist (e.g., Bærenholdt et al., 2004; Gibson et al., 2007; Hazra et al., 2017; Pavlovich, 2003; Sørensen, 2007).

Quantitative and mathematical network research, including tourism network research, has often focused on the centrality and density of actors (Scott et al., 2008). For example, destination governance studies have used such approaches to identify central and influential

destination actors; the extent of actors' connection; and the flows of information and ideas to predict large-scale behaviours and conduct scenario analysis (Pechlaner, Baggio, et al., 2010). Compared with such studies, the strengths of qualitative case-based network research include its ability to provide in-depth interpretations of roles of networks, of actors within those networks (Jack, 2010), and of particular relations between heterogeneous actors (private and public; individuals; companies and organisations). Qualitative network analysis favours thick descriptions of networks, including their context; their complex spatial historical, material, production, consumption, and cultural conditions; and their benefits—all of which is particularly relevant in the field of tourism studies (Møller & Sørensen, 2017). Qualitative network studies can also illustrate how different actors can have varying perceptions about particular networks and about their benefits, depending, for example, on the position of actors in the network, the interests of these actors, and the roles they perform. In this way, networks are not objective entities but rather social constructions (Møller & Sørensen, 2017). This means that it is impossible to build objective accounts of networks, and this can be considered a limitation of qualitative network studies. However, such studies' strength lies in the fact that they enable researchers to capture, analyse, and understand different perceptions and interpretations of the network, by means of which actor roles, network developments, and results of networks may be understood.

The case considered in this study is a destination innovation network in a small Scandinavian summer holiday destination. It can be considered an extreme case (Flyvbjerg, 2006) due to the presence of fierce conflicts, even hate, between different destination actors. Despite this negative feeling, with the support of a regional tourism development project an innovation network formed involving many of the disagreeing actors. Compared with typical cases, extreme cases can showcase phenomena and emphasise their basic mechanisms. Single

extreme case studies are particularly relevant as they can provide complex and in-depth knowledge about a phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

The case study was longitudinal, and was carried out between 2013 and 2015 during the innovation network's development process. The study relied on a hermeneutic social science approach (Gadamer, 1989); in such an approach, abductive interpretation is a continuous process during which deeper understandings of context-dependent phenomena are sought.

A number of data collection methods were employed in the study (Table 1). First, passive observations were conducted of meetings and seminars, including two network meetings, a public information meeting at the destination, and a public development seminar at the destination.

Second, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with key people in the network and representatives of other important private and organisational actors at the destination. Eleven recorded interviews, each lasting 60 to 90 minutes, were conducted during spring and summer of 2014. The interview questions varied slightly according to informant type, but the main themes concerned the informants' perceptions of: (a) the destination's characteristics and development possibilities; (b) its collaborative atmosphere; (c) the innovation network, including its characteristics, its actors, and their roles; and its successes, potentials, barriers, and future organisation.

Third, there was continuous ongoing informal dialogue with a consultant who had the role of network manager in the innovation network. This facilitated ongoing access to information about the network's progress.

[Table 1 near here]

Fourth, three informal follow-up interviews were carried out during the summer of 2015. These interviews were conducted to obtain information on the consequences of conflicts for the network's development, including whether these conflicts had impeded the implementation of development initiatives, whether the network was still intact, and how the network was operating. The follow-up interviews were carried out with key members of the network via phone.

Fifth, retrospective participant observation constituted an important data collection and reflection method in this study. While the aforementioned consultant was not involved as an active researcher during most of the study process, she became involved in the final stages and in writing this article. Thus, her activities can be interpreted as a type of participant observation reflected upon retrospectively.

Sixth, to ensure the findings' trustworthiness, they were presented to the central network members and other actors during two seminars. Such solicitation of reactions from participants, in addition to prolonged engagement and interaction with respondents, are aspects that ensure the trustworthiness of findings in naturalistic enquiries (Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Additionally, bias in this study was limited by means of triangulating methods and interpreters. As a result, the presented findings are, like those of other naturalistic studies, not context-free truth statements that can be generalised. However, the findings may be relevant and indicative for other actors and destinations because of the potential transferability (Guba & Lincoln 1982) of the findings.

As noted above, the analysis followed a hermeneutic and abductive reasoning approach in which theory and analysis of empirical data mutually informed each other. The

analysis of empirical data relied on meaning condensation and meaning interpretation (Kvale, 2011), which entailed focusing particularly on identifying different actors' interpretations and perspectives of the innovation network; these actors' roles; and how these roles were performed through actions, for which reasons, and to what end. It should be noted that the analysis interprets the roles of different actors from the innovation-oriented perspective of the network. This entails bias because it views the collective data through a specific interpretive tourism growth-oriented lens. This also indicates possible ethical dilemmas associated with the development and growth-oriented development project in a destination where other interests are obviously also present. Thus, an innovation-biased interpretation of the data can also pose ethical dilemmas because it may not sufficiently nuance the roles of different actors. To remedy this, discussions in the analysis section will reflect on the nature of the development driven by the project, as well as on other possible development perspectives, thus nuancing the roles of different actors, including brokers and saboteurs.

## **Case study**

### ***The destination and its collaborative environment***

The destination is a village with about 2,300 inhabitants and 2,000 private holiday houses. It has an idyllic harbour with several restaurants (primarily seafood restaurants), a café, and a hotel. Other restaurants and two campsites are scattered in the harbours' vicinity and close to one of the destination's two beaches. The village has a few shops, primarily supermarkets and clothing shops. The most popular beach is situated just south of the harbour. The other beach, which is barely used by tourists, is located one kilometre north of the harbour. The destination



attracts mainly domestic tourists (see also Author X and Y [reference anonymised for peer review] for an introduction to the destination and the actor perspectives presented below).

The interviewees characterise the destination as idyllic, surrounded by lovely nature and fine beaches. However, it is also characterised as lacking development: “... nothing has been developed during the last 20 years. Not a single thing! Nothing has been built. Nothing has been changed” (I [see Table 1 for interview numbering]). Furthermore, the destination is argued to lack class. It does not have, for example, a high-quality hotel, and the gastronomy is a “fish-and-chips culture”. Additionally, it has a short summer season of about seven weeks, most restaurants and shops are closed from October to April, and there are few activities for visitors outside high season. However, the interviewees emphasised that activities on offer are also limited during high season. Finally, the service level is said to be poor. According to the interviewees, the lack of development results from a lack of collaboration in the destination.

Central destination actors consist of various local tourism companies, the harbour (which owns most of the central areas in the destination), holiday homeowners’ associations (nine in all), a business association, a local council (composed of local non-business actors), the municipal tourist organisation, the municipality, and several other associations, such as a nature protection organisation and a sports association. Regarding opinions about destination development, actors can be divided into those who prefer a “status quo” and those who are very development-oriented.

The local council belongs to the status quo group: “The local council has sometimes taken a critical stance towards the business association’s suggestions and said ... do we need more cafés or how should it look?” (X). In addition, the holiday homeowners’ associations seek to protect the status quo. These associations are mainly located along the beach that is not used intensively by tourists. There is a lack of tourism infrastructure to access this beach,

and on the beach itself, and the holiday homeowners' associations are accused of obstructing access to the beach: "They don't want too many people over there. So, everything is being fenced in with stones and closed with chains so that it is impossible to park a car anywhere" (II). These and other actors, who mainly represent the older generation, prefer to protect the destination's idyllic character: "The strength [of the destination] is that it is the way it is ... People enjoy simply sitting and looking at what is going on ... There doesn't have to be an amusement park everywhere ... There are just some things you shouldn't change" (IX). Maintaining the status quo involves not attracting the younger generation to the destination: "There is nothing for the young people ... we have a reasonable level now ... I don't think there is any interest in a noisy pub" (X). Generally, those actors do not see a need to attract more tourists: "I don't think we necessarily need more tourists. But I accept that we can try to spread out the season" (X).

The more entrepreneurial tourist businesses belong to the development-oriented group of actors: "We have to lift the area. We need to attract some more tourists" (I). Those actors see a need for new development initiatives: "There should be some more business ... If we have to ... keep them [the tourists] here for a bit longer, then we have to offer them something" (III). However, this development-oriented group of actors is itself not homogeneous, and different interests are represented. A big player is the harbour. Though the harbour supports tourism development, its main interest is the harbour business: "Our activities in [the destination] are very tourist-oriented, but we maintain that it is an industrial harbour" (IV). This creates conflicts, such as when a central part of the harbour was renewed during the short peak tourist season. Finally, certain life-style entrepreneurs are said to "mind their own business" and not involve themselves in different initiatives with other actors: "The restaurants have their own agenda ... They have enough work to do in their own [business]" (VI).

Thus, various strong interests are present, making matters complex:

We have a special challenge because it is a place where people live, and at the same time, we need as many tourists as possible. It is also a harbour that ... has a function.

Those are some focus areas that often clash and result in conflicts about the development of the place. (V)

The clashes have led to open conflicts, and the harbour manager, for example, is disliked by many non-tourism actors. As indicated above, some tourist businesses also have conflicts with the harbour. Conversely, the harbour manager has little empathy for those who do not think in business terms, or who have a more communitarian, non-liberalist approach to life. The development-oriented tourist businesses openly dislike the holiday homeowners' associations for being against development. A conflict between the business association and the local council is also evident: "In terms of tourism, it is kind of a fight between the business association, which wants tourism because it brings in money, and the local council, which simply prefers to maintain the status quo" (VIII). The holiday homeowners dislike businesses that create change and aim to attract more tourists, which the homeowners consider to be egoistic behaviour. Development-oriented tourist businesses also criticise the small life-style tourism businesses for failing to deliver quality food and services, and for not engaging in destination development. Some of the development-oriented businesses also consider the local representative of the nature organisation to be left-wing (from their perspective, a negative thing). They also have little faith in the municipal tourism organisation, which: "is a dry-stick association. Nothing happens" (IV). In addition, the municipal authorities are criticised for not taking tourism seriously and instead favouring other economic activities (e.g., the harbour). Finally, the businesses have little sympathy for the local inhabitants in general:

All the local inhabitants, as they have gotten older, think that they should relax and that there shouldn't be too much “fairground entertainment” and noise. ... They have finished their professional careers and now they just want peace and tranquillity. (III)

The different actors' perspectives lead to fundamentally different approaches to destination development: “Where we have seen conflicts, it has basically concerned the definition of the development of the area, because there are some different interest groups” (V).

Lack of development, controversies, and disagreements are mutually related to a lack of communication and collaboration between actors in the destination. Communication is often indirect and hostile, and occurs through local media. For example, when the café owner built a terrace along the harbour bank it was considered, by some, to be an egoistic act that destroyed the authenticity of the destination: “That ... terrace out there, there have been so many protests ... They [the local council] have been invited down here, but they didn't want to meet me, and then they write complaints in the newspaper instead” (I). In such indirect dialogue, accusations and criticisms predominate: “I [harbour manager] have almost been executed and shamed in all of the newspapers and on the Internet and many other places as a criminal because I let [the café owner build the terrace]” (IV).

#### *The destination innovation network*

The innovation network initiative aimed to facilitate collaborative destination development. It was part of a larger tourism development project run by the regional tourism organisation and a university. To establish a group of destination actors that could participate in this project, the business association's foreman (who is also the owner of the café mentioned above) was requested to ask different actors to join a development group. He deliberately asked people

whom he knew would disagree about many things, but were all relatively development oriented. In this way, it was expected that development initiatives could move forward with broader support: “It should be a broadly combined group that included both the green and the very blue. They can’t be too similar, the persons you ask. And I promise you: They are not!” (I). Though this actor was considered a conflict-seeker by many, he managed to build the initial development group, which consisted of him and five other actors: the hotel manager, a campsite manager, the harbour manager, the local representative of a nature protection organisation/manager of children’s activities centre, and the municipality’s event and tourism manager. As anticipated, these actors represented different interests and did not always agree about development initiatives.

Subsequently, the tourist consultant (supported financially by the development project) became connected with the development group. She had no prior relation to the destination or the group’s actors. This independent outsider status was essential in facilitating the collaboration: “Otherwise, it wouldn’t have been possible ... The consultant has ensured that we have been able to talk together in a relatively decent way” (V), “The consultant has been able to diffuse some conflicts. She has been able to keep people on track. She has been good at finding the right direction and keeping it” (I).

However, approval of other key stakeholders was needed to establish broad support for development initiatives. Consequently, the development group created a strategy proposal and invited local organisational actors to give feedback. A meeting was held with the local council, a local representative of an important environmental NGO, the local sports organisation, and the municipality’s mayor and director. The consultant also held separate meetings with holiday homeowners’ associations to establish initial indirect dialogue (direct dialogue was considered impossible at that point due to disagreements between the actors). Adaptions were made to the strategy, and a public meeting was then held. Everybody in the

village was invited; 250 people participated and had the opportunity to discuss the strategy plan. At the meeting, the holiday homeowners' associations' disinterest in the initiative became clear, not least because it would increase visitor flows to the northern beach. One holiday homeowners' association representative made it clear, for example, that toilet buildings or other amenities would never be implemented at the beach (as a reaction to the development group's suggestion to improve the beach's infrastructure). However, other participants supported the idea of taking actions to develop the destination.

After the meetings, the strategy plan was again adjusted and a plan-of-action seminar was held. All interested people in the village were invited. About 50 people from various groups participated, including representatives from some holiday homeowners' associations and the local council. At the seminar, participants were divided into differently themed sub-groups. A number of development ideas were developed, and, at the meetings' end, participants voted for the best ideas. Project groups were then established to continue work on these ideas. The groups included representatives of those who had developed and suggested the ideas, and a member of the development group. The projects aimed to increase access to the northern beach, improve infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, revitalise the town's central square, create events, and more.

Thus, until this point, the development initiative had favoured network creation and exploration at the fuzzy front end of destination innovation. However, by establishing specific workgroups that should develop specific innovations, the network became more focused on exploitation. The network became configured with a core consisting of the members of the development group and a number of development networks attached to the core.

The process was successful, and unlikely actors were now working towards destination innovation. However, the network faced new challenges. When the development

programme ended, funds for the consultant and support from the regional tourism organisation and university disappeared, as did the knowledge held by these actors—for example, with respect to writing funding applications. To facilitate a smoother transition to the new reality, the harbour and the business association decided to finance a short-term contract with the consultant. The aim was to reconfigure and broaden the development group to include all central destination stakeholders to cement cooperation among the actors. At a new founding meeting, more than 25 people, representing different stakeholders, attended. However, old controversies surfaced at the meeting, which was unconstructive. Consequently, it was decided to reduce the network to nine people representing the different stakeholders: the municipal tourism organisation, the campsite, the hotel, the green NGO, the business association, the harbour, the Local Council, a holiday homeowner's association, and the sports association.

At a subsequent network meeting, dialogue flowed well and important issues, such as income generation for a seed-capital fund for local projects, were discussed. However, when the local council's representative informed council members about the discussions new stories surged in the local press, including a critique of the harbour manager indicating that he had worked to create more income for the harbour only, and not for the destination's well-being. Subsequently, the harbour left the network. Given the lack of funds, the consultant was also no longer involved in the network. Subsequently, the campsite manager picked up the pieces, and the destination development network has remained partly active, but: "We need a facilitator for the destination development network. Otherwise, it will fall apart" (III). Out of the proposals arising from the action plan seminar, two were launched. Today (2020) the network continues to exist as a collaboration between the business organization, the tourist organization and the local council. The network organizes a running event every year and continues to drive initiatives to develop the destination. Plans include building a maritime

playground on the central worn-down square of the village and revitalising the square.

However, such plans continue to raise concerns from local inhabitants who argue that the plans will lead to increased noise and traffic, and they maintain that the square should stay as it is (e.g. Karrebæksmindeinfo, 2019; SN, 2018). Not all stakeholders are included in the development, but those that chose to be part of the process are working collaboratively with the innovations.

### *Analysis and discussion*

Actors with different objectives, norms, cultures, and values populated the destination.

Distrust and conflict flourished, rather than collaboration, because the actors used shared resources for different, often conflicting, purposes—for instance, for running tourism or other types of businesses, for everyday living, and for owning private holiday homes. In particular, development initiatives clashed with a more protective approach towards the authentic and idyllic atmosphere of the destination. As such, the actors populated different political and ideological spheres (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014), making collaboration difficult.

In spite of the actors' different perspectives, the case illustrates how destination innovation network development took place. The development involved different network phases which included elements of both exploration and exploitation. During the network development process, actors of central importance varied. Table 2 lists the most important types of actors and their roles for network development in the case. Figure 1 condenses the network development and its phases and relates this to actions and activities of the different types of actors. Figure 2 illustrates how relations between different types of actors evolved during the development. The illustrated development and the different roles played by the actors are analysed and discussed in the following.



[Insert Table 2 here]

[Figure 1 near here]

[Figure 2 near here]

Initially, a *superstructure organisation* (the regional tourism body) (see Lynn et al., 1996) launched the initiative in collaboration with a *systemic intermediary* (the university) (see Howells et al., 2009). These actors functioned as facilitators (Pechlaner, Presenza et al., 2010) and established an overall organisational frame by providing some financial support, organising initial meetings, supporting via knowledge, and paying the consultant.

The organisations incited a local actor (the foreman of the business organisation) to establish a local network group. This actor can thus be considered a *network broker* (see Klerkx & Leeuwis, 2009) who brought other unlikely actors together and attempted to create initial trust. After the first group was formed, the network broker function was assigned to the consultant, who, being an outsider, had better potential to facilitate communication and dialogue between the actors through a sort of diplomacy. The network broker facilitated the inclusion of unlikely actors who had previously disagreed about most things, but among whom consensus about development initiatives was reached during the process (e.g., in the case of the holiday homeowners' associations). These factors made establishing a loose exploration network supporting a fuzzy front-end innovation process possible, and subsequently facilitated the development of a network with several stronger clusters that supported exploitation. This resulted in the actualisation of three specific innovation projects.

For such realisation, some network members had to change their perspectives and network roles. These *converted actors* became oriented more towards collective network benefits than towards their own activities only. Thus, they changed from relatively *egocentric network actors*, who (like Elfring and Hulsink's [2007] innovating entrepreneurs) sought personal benefits mainly, to more *collectively oriented network actors* who were more focused on overall network benefits. An example concerns the Harbour Manager:

People like [name] from the nature protection organisation ... He is ... kind of a hippie ... A contradiction to me ... it's good because it would be too much if someone like me could just move quickly. Then there would be concrete and entertainment everywhere. (IV)

The same was true for other actors, such as the holiday homeowners' associations. Such a transformation of roles was facilitated by communication between, and the inclusion of, different actors, by the consultants' network broker role and by dialogue during meetings: "Earlier, very few persons made development projects and nobody heard about those projects until they were almost realised ... so dialogue has never been tried before in a proper way" (V). Even the holiday homeowners' associations became part of the network. Inclusion, common understanding, and the potential to influence the process convinced unlikely actors to participate:

If you want to influence something at all and not just sit back and criticise afterwards, then of course you have to participate actively ... Some misunderstandings have been removed, so we have gone from saying "What the hell is going on?" to thinking that it generally sounds positive. (X)

Thus, different actors who had a tradition of disagreeing now worked together to develop the destination.

However, while conflicting values, norms, and agendas were partly overcome, the network faced serious problems related to other performed roles and because some actors and their roles disappeared. The superstructure agents and the consultant played important roles in network development. Because those crucial roles would soon disappear, the development group sped up the development process in an attempt to firmly establish an all-inclusive network and enter a more exploitative innovation phase. Nevertheless, when the aforementioned roles were no longer being performed, the network ran into a process of semi-disintegration. This disintegration partly resulted because the development group did not manage to include and reach consensus with central actors, especially the local council. The local council was strongly in favour of protecting the authentic and idyllic character of the destination. Seen from the development group's perspective, this actor was a *network saboteur*. From their point of view the role is comparable to Burt's (2000) network entrepreneur, or *tertius gaudens*, who utilises networks to play actors against each other to achieve personal benefits; in our case, however, the saboteur also aimed to sabotage the development network, its relations, and its activities. However, for the saboteur, the activities of the development network were perceived to be of negative value for the common good of the destination. Thus, the role of our saboteur is not per se an egoistic one and while the term "saboteur" may have negative connotations, this will depend on whose side you are (saboteurs and their networks were considered heroes during and after the Second World War for example). Conversely, in our case, the broker (see above) may from the saboteur's point of view also be considered one that seeks personal benefits rather than collective benefits. Thus, we do not attain only positive or negative values to these actors, and we will further discuss these aspects below.

Trust and communication are central to success in using networks for development and innovation (Beritelli, 2011; Ramayah et al., 2011). Despite differences in perceptions and

needs, the original six members of the development group managed to obtain consensus regarding the destination identity and strategy. They were able to focus on collective benefits of network cooperation and, through their cohesive stance, to convey this to a larger group of actors (e.g., during the public meeting and the action plan seminar). However, a lack of trust and consensus, at a crucial moment, led to disintegration of the network after it was extended to include the holiday homeowners' associations, the sports association, and the local council. Involving stakeholders was a key element in the destination development process; however, in this case such inclusion may have been excessive: "The local council should never have been part of the group—they have a completely different agenda ... Maybe we can only include a few [actors]" (I). Rather than contributing to collaboration, the premature widening of the development group to include other actors, particularly the local council, diminished the influence of the original development group and weakened the network relationships.

A final type of actor, *free-riding actors* (see Hjalager, 2000), including various restaurants, indirectly affected the innovation network building process. First, these parties indirectly impacted the destination's general collaborative atmosphere, thereby limiting development initiatives. Second, due to their absence from the innovation network they limited its potential and sustained the powerful position of the network saboteur.

The case suggests that actors performing different roles in concert are able to overcome distrust and conflicting agendas in tourist destinations. In this case, the roles of outsiders—a superstructure agent and a systemic intermediary—supported the brokering roles of an insider (a local business actor) followed by another outsider (a consultant). Through careful communication, trust building, and consensus building these brokers managed to convince and convert certain other actors to participate in the innovation network. However, in this case, support from the outside superstructure agent, systemic intermediary, and network broker disappeared at a crucial moment, at the transition between exploration and

exploitation. The network development process was accelerated but insufficient trust and consensus among all relevant actors was established as they entered the more exploitative development phase, in which trust, common norms, and goals turned out to be even more important than in the exploration phase. Consequently, for example, the local council regained its role as network saboteur, and now had substantial power to do so.

Roles are associated with power (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011) and the case illustrates how, in addition to trust and communication, power is important for the different actors to succeed with their network roles. Nevertheless, different groups can vary in their perceptions of power and, for example, may equate such power to the possession of assets for locals or to control over mechanisms, processes, or knowledge for external actors and public authorities (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011). Influence in a destination can be exerted by actors who recognise each other's importance, trust each other, and have efficient communication. However, they do not need to understand or like each other. Such situations may sustain systemic destination leadership, which comprises an inter-relational type of leadership among interdependent actors whose different actions lead to summated and possibly synergetic benefits (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014). With the support of the superstructure agent, the systemic intermediary, and the consultant, the development group can be considered to have held a particularly powerful position to involve different actors in a collective network development process. However, while relations with external actors may provide knowledge—and, in this case, power—they can also affect local trust negatively (Beritelli et al., 2013). In turn, trust may guide collaboration (or a lack thereof may inhibit collaboration) more than rational logic (Beritelli, 2011). In the case analysed, while outside influence facilitated some degree of networking this did not necessarily lead to long-term trust among all actors in the destination. When the outside influence disappeared, power was somewhat regained by those who opposed the development initiative. The power exercised in this case illustrates how different network

strategies and roles are used to assume power. Power was previously connected to land ownership, money, and the Church (Christensen & Daugaard Jensen, 2008)—and, in the case analysed, the harbour and the business association. However, Internet-based communication has offered a new sphere of influence that is unattached to official power and separate from traditional networks and social capital. Media, such as local newspapers, websites, and social media, are important means of disseminating public opinion. Negotiation is a process of communication, and the local council successfully used such platforms to extend its influence and thereby assume the role of network saboteur.

While the theoretical set-up and analysis somewhat implicitly assumes that tourism development through innovation is desirable, the analysis shows that this was not the opinion of all actors in the case destination. Many of the disagreements, some of which were not concealed in the network, could be interpreted as arising due to system gaps (Dooley & O’Sullivan, 2007; Klerkx & Leeuwis, 2009) between a tourism development-oriented system and the other socio-economic, cultural, and political systems of the place which included many non-tourism interests.

In particular, these systems had different perceptions of potential sustainable developments. Sustainable tourism development includes providing high-quality experiences for tourists while maintaining the environment and improving quality of life of the host community (Flagestad & Hope, 2001). However, the tourism industry is often focused on growth, and growth has also become central to sustainable tourism development (Fletcher et al., 2019). This has led to the critique that tourism often focuses on narrow development approaches, thereby emphasising economic development over the wellbeing of local residents and nature preservation (Flagestad & Hope, 2001; Hall, 2010). An alternative can be found among proponents of steady state tourism who do not feel that “more is better” per se, or who equate development not with economic growth but with qualitative developments that

emphasise quality of life and well-being. Yet another perspective that has gained momentum recognises a need to de-grow tourism—for example, by reducing the intensity and impacts of tourists—to counter over-tourism and the discontent of residents arising from the impacts of tourism on their lives. Among other things, proponents of this approach have suggested that tourism development be based on principles of commons creation and conviviality, and/or on reducing the material and energy flows required by tourism (Fletcher et al., 2019).

Proponents and opponents of tourism growth can often both be found simultaneously in destinations. Additionally, among actors who support sustainable tourism development within destinations various green growth and de-growth perspectives may be found, which can lead to tensions between, for example, ego-centric versus altruistic-oriented actors, and between expansion versus consolidation- or downsizing-oriented actors (Panzer-Krause, 2017, 2019).

From these perspectives, for the holiday house owners association more (tourism) was not better and growth did not equate to development. The association perceived the development network as growth-addicted, fearing that this would lead to a local version of over-tourism and, thus, unsustainable development. Instead, the association favoured a more evenly distributed affluence of tourist throughout the year thus encouraging a more qualitative form of development. From the association's perspective, the conflict arose between a steady-state approach (emphasising the quality of life of the local population) and a growth-oriented approach, such that brokers of the latter could be characterised as saboteurs. Thus, just as networks comprise social constructions that may be perceived differently by different actors, perceptions of the different roles of actors may also vary. Innovation networks may facilitate collaboration between proponents of the divergent development approaches (Panzer-Krause, 2017, 2019); however, in the analysed case reconciliation was only partly achieved, and

further communication, consensus, and trust building was needed to establish a destination innovation network that would remain successful over the longer term.

In addition to the harsh preconditions (including disagreements, controversies, lack of communication and trust, etc.), characteristics of the development initiative may also have limited the long-term success of the networks. Often, tourism destination development initiatives exclude many local people who are affected by decisions made during the development process. Collaborative planning seeks to avoid this through a more inclusive approach of joint decision-making. However, powerful elites may have the ability to set the direction and terms of collaboration, and this is often based on a producer-oriented development paradigm that marginalises those who challenge pro-development views and practices (Healy et al., 2012). In the analysed case the focus was on collaboration and participatory development, and specific innovation initiatives were not defined beforehand. Nevertheless, the decision to follow a growth-oriented approach formed the foundation of the activities. As described above, those who did not adhere to this growth paradigm were considered as actors who needed to be convinced. Thus, they were marginalised not from the project but from defining its purpose in the first place, and the development frames of the project did not include their development approach (Figure 2). More successful collaborations must therefore include participation by all relevant actors, including in defining the overall goals of the projects, and, for example, choosing between the available sustainability approaches.

## **Conclusion**

This article has illustrated how innovation network development in a conflict-dominated tourist destination depended on a number of different network actor roles and how they



interacted. Different actor roles were necessary in framing the network, overcoming distrust, and building consensus, as well as in creating an exploration network, followed later by an exploitation network. However, the case also shows the fragility of networks, as agencies of development, in destinations where multiple interests seek to utilise the same set of shared resources. Consequently, other actors may choose to fight against innovation network development initiatives, acting as network saboteurs.

Thus, different network roles performed by, for example, superstructure agents; systemic intermediaries; network brokers; both ego-centred and collectively-oriented network actors; free-riding actors; and not least, network saboteurs influence innovation network development. The complex interplay of roles driven by divergent interests suggests that network building in tourist destinations is a complex process that must accommodate many opinions. Likewise, network management and the combination of different complementary actors and roles must be conducted with care, with a number of central actors and roles present during the entire process. This includes the network-purpose defining phase, in which consensus among different development perspectives should be established to facilitate future collaboration. The focus should be on ensuring that a sufficient amount of trust and consensus regarding development trajectories exists among all relevant actors—especially, when destination networks are transiting from exploration to exploitation.

In destinations such as that analysed, the time-limited nature of externally funded crucial network actor roles—for instance, of superstructure agencies, systemic intermediaries, and network brokers—poses a threat to the survival and success of network initiatives. Crucial actor roles may disappear from the network before it has matured enough to sustain itself or before new actors have been found or developed to perform the needed roles. The time-limited nature of externally funded network actor roles may also mean, as in the case analysed, that the innovation processes will be “fast forwarded”, and that necessary trust and

consensus about sustainable development trajectories is not developed in time before moving into the exploitative phase. Therefore, a crucial superstructure role and focus area in destination innovation network building should be the training and development not only of networks as such, but of actors who can perform the needed roles from a long-term perspective. In the case analysed, this task was not carried out. Instead, crucial roles disappeared from the network when funding ended, and, consequently, the innovation process was sped up and entered an exploitation phase before the network had “matured” enough to support this.

The case also suggests that the potential of different actors to carry out their destination innovation network roles is intrinsically related to various types of power structures. Networks are increasingly influenced by outside factors or alternative networks, such as discussions on social media. Such networks cannot be fully controlled and exert additional pressure on relationships between network actors. It is therefore even more important to establish and maintain openness, dialogue, and trust among actors right from the beginning of the network development process. It can also be fruitful for the destination innovation network to supply success stories quickly through social media, and generally to use such media as an integrated part of the network.

Considering that the issues identified in the case are extreme but not unique for the specific destination, the findings of this study will be relevant to many destinations and development programs also outside the specific national and Scandinavian context. The analysis of an extreme case means that causes, consequences, and implications of the analysed issue stand out more clearly (Flyvbjerg, 2006), and that implications of the findings may be transferred to other destinations and development initiatives (cf. the concept of transferability [Guba & Lincoln, 1982]), always taking the particular context into account.

However, conditions for destination networking change throughout the life of destinations (Pavlovich, 2003; Zehrer & Raich, 2010). As indicated, within the destination analysed the conditions today remain the same as when data collection was done, but networking in the destination will probably change over time. Furthermore, economic and societal conditions for tourism development in general change over time and such changes may also have an impact on local destination networking. The current Covid-19 crisis, for example, may incite local actors' to join local networking initiatives that improve the competitive situation of destinations and such crises may bring different actors together in new schemes of collaboration. Consequently, the specific findings presented in this article cannot be generalized to the future but are still transferable. Thus, the article's overall argument, that actors play different roles in destination network development and that it is relevant to understand these roles and their interplay to develop destinations in directions that comply with local actors' interests, are still relevant today and will be so also in the future.

However, because every destination is unique and has its own configuration of actors and conflicting or complementary interests, further research about the interplay of different network actors' roles for destination network building would be beneficial to gain a fuller and more complete understanding of how different network actor roles can beneficially operate in concert in tourist destination innovation networks, and how such networks can be successfully managed.

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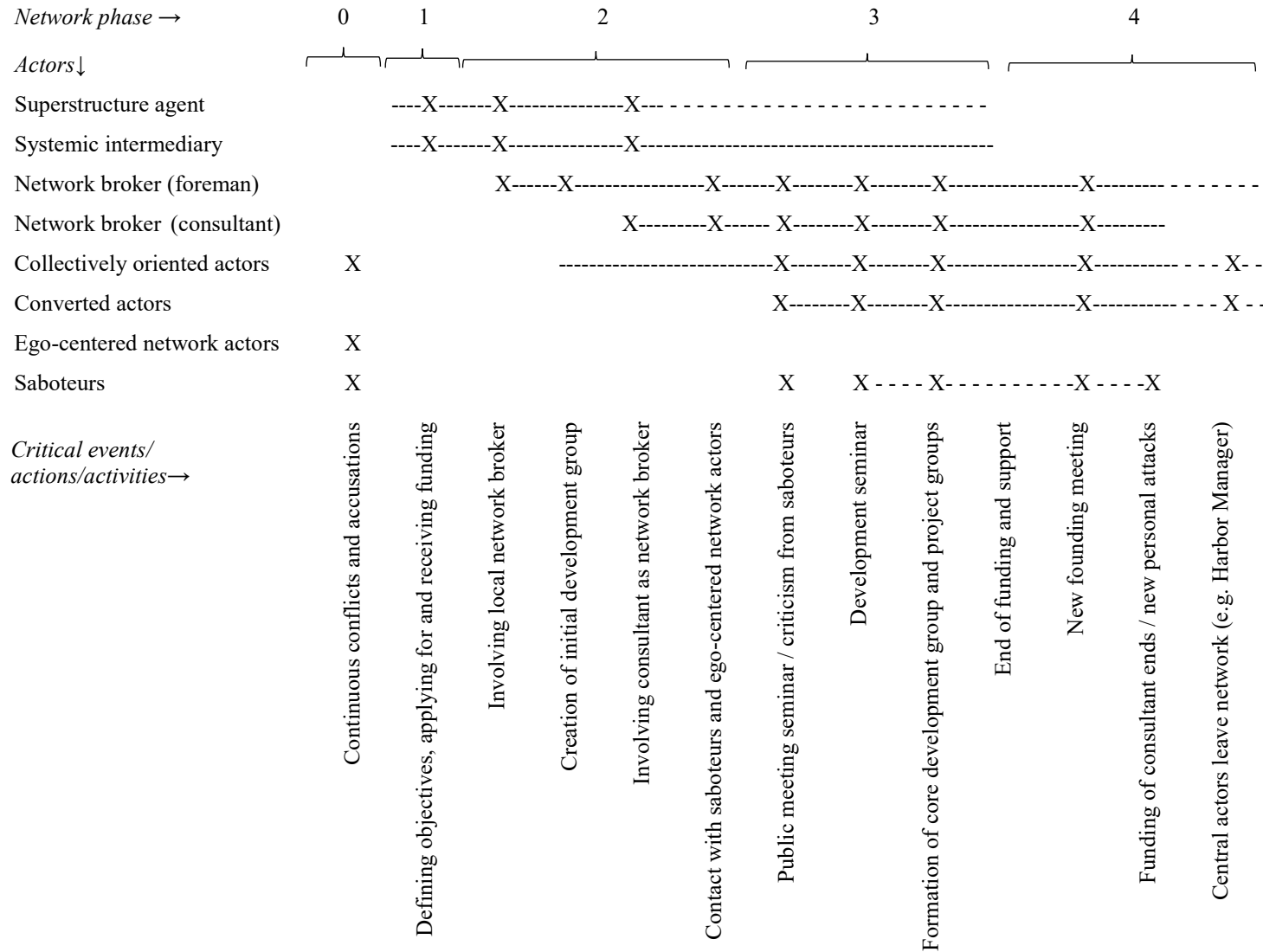


Figure 1: Types of actors, critical actions and phases of the development network. Legend: X: actors taking - and participating in - critical actions affecting network development. ---: Actors in the development network. - - - : Actors more loosely connected to the network. Phase 0: Preface. Phase 1: Definition and creation of development frame. Phase 2: Initial network formation. Phase 3: Exploration and further network development. Phase 4: Exploitation and network disintegration.

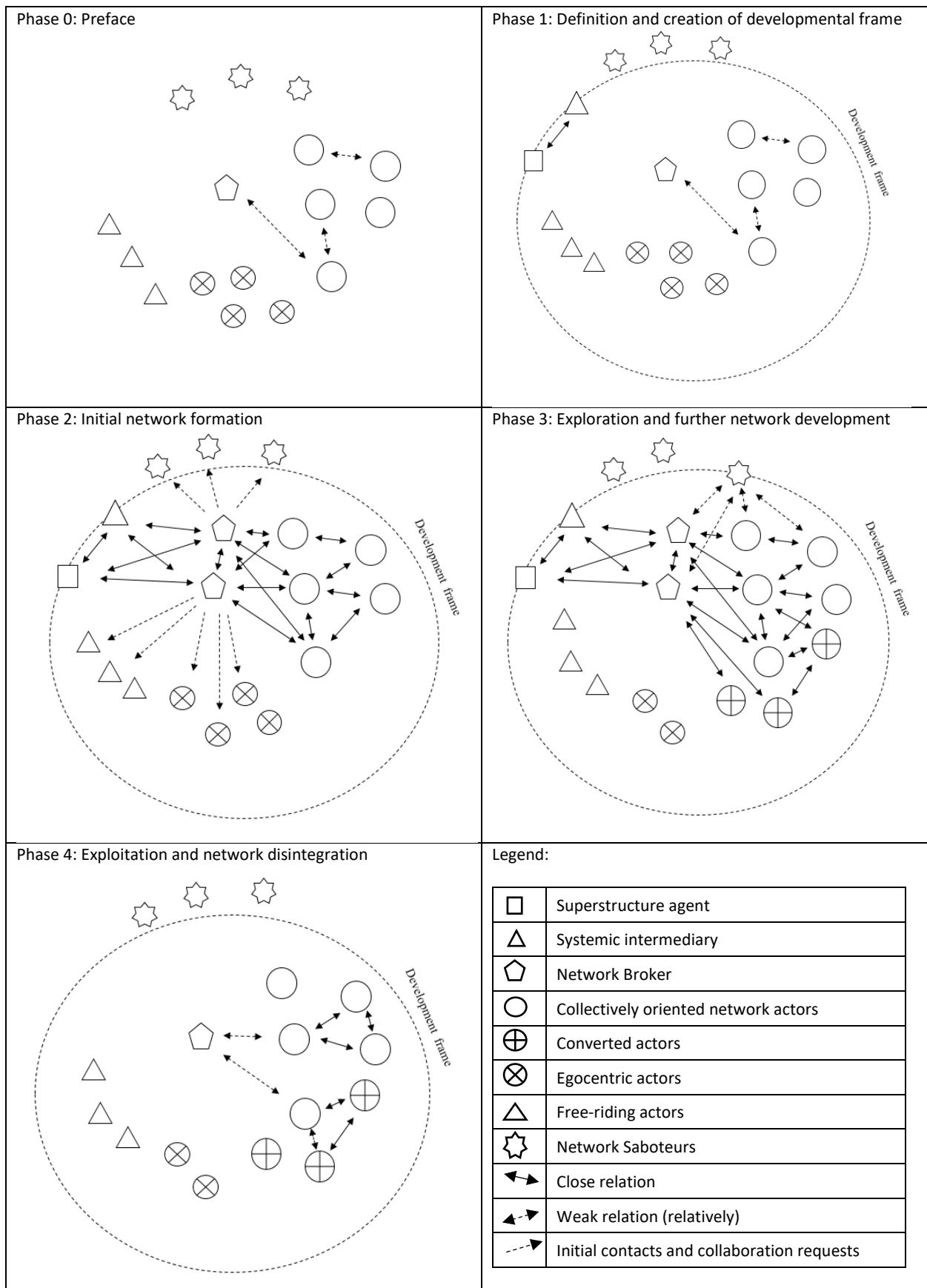


Figure 2: Main characteristics and phases of the development network. For illustrative purposes, the actual number of actors and their relations in the figure are relative exemplifications rather than exact representations.